

A SHARED PROMISED LAND: THE CHURCH AS ADVOCATE FOR JUST
AND EQUITABLE PRACTICES AROUND COMMUNITY
REVITALIZATION AND GENTRIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

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The project context is Bowie United Methodist Church in Bowie, Maryland. The problem in the context is that church leaders are not equipped to engage with the broader community for civic development. If Bowie United Methodist Church leaders participate in community organizing training, then they will be equipped to lend a voice of justice to community development. This six-week training includes pre- and post-training data collected using a variety of surveys, interviews, and journals. As a result of participating in this training, participants will be equipped to engage in community organizing around the prevention of negative effects of gentrification.

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I acknowledge the Holy Spirit, without whom nothing is created, for stirring up the gifts that helped me achieve this research goal. I extend a great deal of gratitude to my husband, James, who in a myriad of ways, compensated and stood in for me. I thank my daughters, Phyllis and Brittany, my son, Larry, and my granddaughter, Zion Michelle, who showed impeccable patience and love for me throughout this journey. I extend gratitude to my mentors, Dr. Lillian Smith who was always willing to be a sounding board throughout this work. Dr. Rudy Rasmus who impressed upon me to stay focused and make the main thing the main thing. And Dr. Vance Ross who continued to challenge me to dig new wells and to read the most insightful authors to make this experience about more than getting degreed but about becoming a seasoned and informed doctor of the church. I am grateful for the guidance of Dr. Joni Sanken who helped me find freedom from the confine of predictability that is so prevalent in scripture interpretation. Finally, I thank God for the people of Bowie United Methodist Church who allowed me to be teacher and student. Their support of and commitment to this enterprise will not be forgotten.

In particular, this work is inspired by my late parents, James Harry and Will Evelyn Shadd, who constantly motivated me to do and be my best, protected my gifts at their personal cost, and inspired me to walk in the legacy of my blood ancestors who fought a fierce fight for justice.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my ancestors whose gifts were ignored and undeveloped because they were women of color.

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INTRODUCTION

God is calling for those who can testify by the Holy Spirit about the intent of God to remind us of our moral responsibility to uphold justice. The church, as ambassador of light, is commissioned to be a voice of influence in every part of life and society. The definition of Christianity affirms the church as moral agent in the world. Matthew chapter twenty-eight affirms the authority given to the church to make disciples of all nations. However, the church has slipped into a place of self-righteous reclusiveness and exclusivity that is in many ways isolated from society. In particular, the local churches have been disconnected from the communities in which they are located. Yes, churches are still handing out clothing, holding bazaars, and delivering meals. Churches continue to post inviting signs in front of the church beckoning all to enter where hearts, minds, and doors are open. Yet, the church has not significantly engaged in purposeful and intense study and engagement of their communities to determine needs and interests. Churches have not fought from spaces of influence to eliminate inherent injustices in community redevelopment such as displacement due to unjust practices of gentrification. Instead, churches have remained focused on growing membership, internal fellowship, and internal business matters as opposed to the war outside the walls. Thus, they have assumed a position of welcomer and not warrior.

Sadly, pastors are not aware of the needs of people residing in the community in which their churches are located. There is a spiritual imperative that goes along with

being a local church that is not simply about the style of worship or internal fellowship but involves interpretation of the church's wider community's demographic, prescription for engagement strategies leading to community vitality, and activation of prescribed strategies. Charisma is more than shouting and speaking in tongue, but the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to enrich society through the sharing and reflection of the voice of Jesus' justice.

Through varied methods of influence, politics, cultural, and socio-economic ideations, and philosophies have invaded communities in mass and without apprehension. The framework on which many of these invasions occur are far removed from the tenets of social justice. Many are built on philosophies leading to wealth acquisition, utopianism, and gentrification for the prosperity of the middle class. Communities that succumb to such philosophies of revitalization are suffering from physical displacement of persons and cultures native to communities. Simultaneously, revitalization strategies focused on wealth building trade the culture of long-term native residents for non-native cultural expressions that bring attention and dollars to a community.

The Chapters

Chapter Two discusses the biblical text related to injustice that undergirds the doctoral project. It highlights the attitude of privilege that sits at the root of many community revitalization efforts. Often the term "revitalization" is a misnomer, misunderstanding, or mask for the real intent to gentrify a community. The biblical chapter highlights the movement of Israel into Canaan as a parallel with Westward Expansion in America. Israel exploited the position of being God's chosen and the line

through which families would be blessed. Instead of behaving as blessers, they invaded land God blessed them with. In their interpretation of chosenness, Israel desired to be the culmination of blessings instead of the God proclaimed conduit through which the earth would be blessed. While the biblical chapter will initiate the discussion of privilege as a precursor of injustice, it will be careful to distinguish the legitimate calling of God to Israel from self-proclaimed manifest destiny leading to the injustice of expansionism and colonialism.

Chapter Three argues that the displacement of people and disvaluing of their culture by community revitalizers and gentrifiers have often waged war on the teaching of the church and have fiercely attempted to undermine the gospel of justice. Chapter Three lends a historical voice to the project. It discusses how historical movements, particularly Westward Expansionism and Colonialization, incidentally or intently displaced populations of people for the purposes of power and greed. Whether for the sake of urbanization or land use and development, there seems to be a bias historically connected to the way people interpret each other's right to "place." The colonization of America and the doctrines and ideologies that supported it developed into a system that spread from east to west. Spanning over 2,968 miles from Jamestown, Virginia to San Francisco, California, an ideology of Manifest Destiny challenged the peace of native peoples, upheld the institution of slavery, and displaced whole communities of people. One cannot deny the economic value of such horrific practices born of this ideology. The theft and hoarding of land and the injustice related to land rights expanded American territory and padded the pockets of white America.

No less effective in expansionism were the practices of gentrification, extermination, and enculturation which are byproducts of colonialism. This chapter and its capstone project will address such a sentiment by examining how Manifest Destiny and Colonialism remain the undercurrent of displacement that has been causing harm to communities. The historical chapter proposes to create a framework through which community development corporations along with churches can address Manifest Destiny. Through the lens of postcolonial theology, the project's historical chapter will introduce Colonialism's connection with the tenets of gentrification, particularly in the Bowie United Method Church community.

A task of Chapter Four, the theological chapter, is to offer an alternative postcolonial interpretation of the anchor biblical text, Numbers chapter thirteen. The main theme and task of postcolonial theology is to deconstruct, challenge, and critique oppressive systems of power and theology designed to dominate and oppress populations. To do so involves deconstructing context and constructing a voice for the dominated. Postcolonialism falls short of offering a practical component that moves society toward transformation. Therefore, it is surmised that postcolonial theology is not singularly transformative but lends to the platform of transformation and equitable action. It is necessary to pair postcolonial theology with Practical Theology so that its truths can manifest, its challenges of colonialism can be practically met, and its questions can be answered. Authors such as Kwok Pui-Lan and Emmanuel Lartey contribute to the chapter by examining the perspective of postcolonial interpreters. The writers create a space for non-traditional interpretation of Numbers chapter thirteen that suggests the intent and message of God to Israel that would extend God's light and justice through Israel to

Canaan. There is some interweaving of Practical Theology inspired by the writings of Emmanuel Lartey. Kwok Pui-lan lends a feminist voice and perspective and thus a layer or intersectionality between class, racial, and gender injustice.

Additionally, the task of this theological chapter is to stress postcolonial understanding of contemporary context and maxims that include sensitivity to religious dynamics and diversity in the interreligious landscape of community. The chapter will elaborate on the Christian perception of God and its intrinsic allowance for the freedom of others to believe what they desire and to be valued as co-laborers in secular community. The proposition of the chapter is that interreligious understanding or at least acknowledgment may circumvent injustices fueled by ideations of “otherness,” binary paradigms of us/them, or superior – inferior classification of people and their communities. It is important for the Christian at the civic table to not merely be tolerant of other religious values that sit at the same table but to share power.

Chapter Five, the interdisciplinary chapter, emphasizes that it is crucial that the church creates space to speak clearly and unwaveringly against injustice done to all people, to engage in practices of reconciliation, and to reinvigorate and revitalize community in love and respect for all. A tool to create such space can be found in community organizing – a process which strategically gathers people with like values and in this instance invokes a strategy around postcolonial theological to develop a paradigm for action. The Chapter utilizes the idea of social capital as an asset for change. The chapter delineates community organizing (the strategy) and social capital (the tool) and explains how they ideally function and equip actors, stakeholders, and investors with collaborative energy to ensure corporate success and benefit.

Finally, Chapter Six provides an analytic description of the capstone project.

Through a postcolonial justice-oriented lens and practical application, the doctoral project engaged in civic organizing and community revitalization by giving voice to the residents of the community and attention to their culture. Using qualitative data, the chapter confirms the hypothesis. As well, the chapter presents the hypothesis and the strategy and paradigm for instruction. Data gathering and protection are stressed. As well, special attention is given to the reflexive nature of the project particularly concerning how my social values impact the project and its outcomes. Furthermore, the analysis addresses the test of the hypothesis which claims that if church members participate in community organizing training, then they will be equipped to lend an active voice of justice to community revitalization.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

This chapter aims to create a description and analysis of the myriad of ways my context and life experience synergize to support a platform for church revitalization. Such a task calls for reflection on the ways in which life and context complemented or even opposed each other. Thus, this chapter lists both life experiences and attempts to create meaning and understanding of their nexus within my current context. I will call on past elements from past contexts to propose my skillset's suitability for the work put forward in the doctoral project.

At times, it might seem to me that I am not "built" for the context in which I serve; maybe I am not the best fit. I am often forced to center myself in purpose by asking myself, "What are you doing here in this place?" However, I am quickly reminded of Jeremiah 29:11 and the feature of God's certainty in a life scheme that I am not astute enough to plan. As a teacher and principal, I always found value, joy, and success in building community. Furthermore, in noticeable ways, my autobiography testifies to God's gift of enlisting people to work toward a common goal and its utility in building community, particularly under difficult circumstances. Therefore, I propose to construct a doctoral project that focuses on organizational revitalization through community

engagement, which would serve as the initial phase of a greater organizational revitalization scheme and process.

Through the ministry of teaching the congregation will discover the value and learn the fundamental aspects of building robust relationships outside the church that are critical components for revitalizing the church and = its community. Therefore, in a Bible study or Christian education forum, I propose and aim to instruct the congregation utilizing a curriculum customized for our church community. This curriculum will prepare members and other community student-recruits for the practice of seeking and forming relationships and opportunities beyond the church's four walls. In general, we will use an inquiry-based learning model and incorporate instructional controls (such as student-teacher relationship-building as a model), and strategies including but not limited to differentiated instruction, collaboration, and praxis.

Context

Bowie United Methodist Church (UMC) is in the Huntington section of Bowie, Maryland, a thriving suburb of Washington, DC. In many ways, however, Huntington fails to meet or mirror the socio-economic dynamic that describes the city of Bowie. Nestled on the north end of the city, Huntington maintained a feel located somewhere between country and suburban. Huntington is known to be a close-knit holdout for White blue-collar families in Prince George's County who—for whatever reason—are unwilling or unable to migrate to Anne Arundel County or other more affluent counties nearby. Members of these blue-collar families were historically active at Bowie UMC. These

families have a long legacy of community membership, including some whose family connection with Huntington was documented as far back as the early 1700's.

While Bowie is home to several businesses, government centers, and entertainment venues, the Huntington section is a lazy unassuming neighborhood with minimal business activity and commercial structures. Possibly the most physically prominent non-residential structures in the Huntington section are the Huntington Community Center and The Old Bowie Grill—a thirty seat Italian restaurant that in warm months seems very busy.

Bowie UMC is a small-membership church. I became the pastor of this church in July 2018. Its Pastor-Parish Relations Committee warmly welcomed me while simultaneously telling me they were the *last of the help*, meaning that they were getting up in age and could not be very active. On my first Sunday there, I walked into a sanctuary where eight precious people sat anxiously waiting for the service to begin. As service was well into its first quarter, a group of approximately five Africans came in and sat in the back. When the worship service ended, one of the Africans walked up to me to thank me for the opportunity to come and pledged to return the following Sunday. Sometime in the following weeks, they expressed that they always felt welcomed there by the former pastors, but some in the congregation—mostly leaders—were cold and uninviting. These types of encounters helped me to understand why I was called to this context.

Current census data indicates that there is an average of forty-six persons attending Sunday worship. Recently, the church held its first baptism in over three years and it included three babies under three years of age and one adult. Also, there was an

influx of men and children over the past year that activated the church's youth ministry and community missions. The church enjoyed a long series of full-time pastors, and I was their first part-time pastor and their first pastor of color.

The church is in a dense residential neighborhood. The largest church in the community is a Catholic church to which many of the residents go. Many failed to convert or join, but they attend. For years, Bowie UMC made a few unsuccessful attempts to connect with people and agencies in the community. However, having connections only evidenced by a Rolodex of phone numbers for resources falls short of the requirements of community-building. Various factions in the community worked for the preservation of their own interests that fail to speak to the interests of the community at large.

A community group exists that for years worked to preserve a park and turn it into a monument representing Huntington's colonial heritage. Long-time African American residents of the Huntington community were not consulted nor incorporated into this heritage preservation work. Many African Americans in Huntington have no visual indicators of their historical ties with the area. There are no statues, placards, nor markers signifying the presence of Black people and their contributions to the community.

The community's White historical preservationist society neglects to acknowledge the importance of the African slaves who labored in the 1800's to build Huntington and farm its land. I attended their meetings at their invitation. On two occasions I questioned them as to how their efforts promote appreciation for Huntington's cultural diversity. The answers were always inadequate as they contend that

the absence of some races was simply an oversight and, now that I am at the table, there would be more attention to that.

In many ways, Huntington was segregated from the city of Bowie and city planners ignored the city. Though it is the founding geographical ground for the city from which the city grew, Huntington was branded “Old Bowie”—a sort of commentary on its contemporary cultural relevance and city planners and developers largely ignored it. As such, the community faded into a rusticity that in no way is capable of competing with its neighboring urban centers.

Huntington has a historic flair that local civic groups, mostly comprised of White citizens, expressed a great interest in preserving. Therefore, moving the community into the twenty-first century is a concept that is not on their table of priorities, possibilities, nor discussion. Fueled by a desire to preserve the Huntington Community’s historical personality and bring attention to its heritage, civic groups in the area along with planning boards create venues that speak of the area’s founding citizens. Highlighted historical citizenry includes farmers, plantation owners, and establishers of the railroad system that made Huntington a place noteworthy in the history of Maryland.

Historical preservation is crucial to any area. However, this preservation ignores the large amount of African American participation and contribution. There is an arts and entertainment festival planned for September 2021 that celebrates Huntington’s history. The historical preservationists secured a group to perform a plantation slave re-enactment—a matter I am currently debating with them. Certainly, we acknowledge the slave as a principal player in the history of Huntington. However, slavery is not the sole contribution or significance of the African Americans who long resided in this area. After

digging into annals of unrecorded history through interviews with Black residents and examination of old newspapers preserved by Black families, it is important that a well-rounded and accurate history of the African American in Huntington exists.

The Huntington section of Bowie lacks the economic spirit of the rest of the City of Bowie. There are a few mom-and-pop style businesses that exist around the old train station that was the center of life in nineteenth and early twentieth century Huntington. There were some attempts by the city and private investors to purchase some of the dilapidated properties to build a more robust commercial center. Historically, the businesses around the railroad depot voiced a lack of interest in revitalization. Many of them—two brothers in particular—owned the property for decades.

One restaurant exists. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the owners adapted to seating restrictions by setting up tables in the middle of the dead-end street that it faces. Each time I pass the restaurant, the front tables are full. People are lined on the side of the building waiting for tables to open. I visited that restaurant many times before the pandemic and never saw it full. Thus, one could presume that the pandemic brings attention to the business. Bowie UMC received the same attention. Since the beginning of parking lot services forced by the pandemic, there was a marked increase in attendance.

Bowie UMC had two noteworthy ecclesiastical connections. The first connection occurred with Ross Church—a Black congregation in the Huntington community that sold its property and “merged” with Bowie UMC. Bowie used the proceeds from the sale of the Ross church property to add a vestibule and two bathrooms to its building. Also, Bowie was in fellowship with Glen Dale Methodist Church who on a few Sundays came to Bowie to eat after worship service. There was an unsteady relationship with St.

Matthew's UMC (among congregations, not pastors), and because of some differences in scriptural interpretation, the relationship ceased until my appointment and the exit of the people that opposed the relationship.

Ministry Journey

Early in my life I recognized how demoralizing it can be for persons whose history is omitted, especially at the hand of people who through omission find benefit and comfort for their own racist and bigoted hearts. My autobiography describes the decades of disenfranchisement we felt at the hands of my mother's White aunt who not only disowned my mother but never acknowledged familial connection. For all the years that I knew her, she never referred to me or my mother as family. She was ashamed that her brother impregnated a Black southern woman and had the audacity to bring the baby to his home to raise among White children. How sad it seemed that she harbored this anger for over seventy years. She ran a prosperous business for almost forty years. She often shared helpful business information and contacts with my father who started a company. Before she got very ill, she would call his suppliers to order equipment and supplies. Her *White voice* would give him ten to twenty percent better prices than his could. I am not sure that she intentionally was helpful, but there was a time when my father stood to lose a lot of income if she failed to speak.

Nevertheless, one day as she laid in bed this bigoted woman took my hand, looked over at my mother, and tried her best to address the matter. Weak and tired and unsuccessful in communicating any remorse with my mother, she died a few days later with her belly full of the last meal my mother gently spoon-fed her. That she revised

history to serve her bigotry, but helped save my father's business, and our family's livelihood complicated and compounded the grief that such an awkward relationship brought.

Whether she cared to admit it, we had a common identity. We had different views including some that were horrifically hurtful to each other, but when she came to live with us, we sought commonalities and there were plenty. Through our experience with her I learned to be relentlessly hopeful. This is a quality that is necessary in this context. There are ways to teach it, but experience this through practice-based instruction is more effective. Part of any curriculum on community-building would concern itself with forming relationships with people with differing political, social, religious, and even moral views.

In the mid-1990s, I was tested on my ability to build relationships despite philosophical difference. I served as the first Black teacher in two schools, including one in which I pushed the inclusion of more African American history and literature in the curriculum. Initially, the proposal failed to go over too well, but after a series of negotiations, most of the idea was reluctantly accepted. In addition, I was appointed as the first African American pastor in a 100% White membership church in Virginia with members whose most vivid account of nineteenth century African American boys was excitement in seeing Confederate soldiers march down the country roads of Caroline County. This appointment enables me to address the contorted historical perception of people who formed limited and bigoted accounts of history to gain comfort for conscience and what it requires of us to work with them toward common goals.

The contemporary civic organizations and clubs that move in the direction of preserving historical context and the people they excite are in this Huntington community. We will work with them even as they purport insidious narratives as those that the Virginia congregation told me. I believe our congregation can benefit from learning about the political understandings that a single community can encase. There must be some cognizance of the fact that Huntington is not a religious community but a blend of people from all walks of life who potentially converge at one space to share in some facet of being.

My background in teaching and experience in engaging parents and community from all backgrounds in mutual initiatives enabled me to see, plan and speak from different perspectives. As a school principal, I cast vision that would galvanize the school in a way that would be sensitive to all stakeholders—students, parents, faculty, staff, business, religious, and government entities. I believe that strong community is built when all major stakeholders' strengths are recognized and built into a revitalization mission. This was my experience in building a strong school community. So, for my context church members, church regulars, church visitors, halfway house residents, business, and government, and even the civic organization attempting to preserve an unbalanced history and heritage of the Huntington Community all factor into the mission.

Walking through the door as a neophyte principal, challenges like those of my current context confronted me. The school was underfunded, understaffed, under-enrolled, and underappreciated among the other schools in its region. One of the first things I did was to invite leaders to meet on three consecutive Saturday mornings to peer educate around creating connections in an urban setting, such as the setting in which the

school was located. Subsequently, we invited persons from the community to join with parents and faculty to form an “Improvement Council” that advised the school’s PTA on areas they believed needed improvement and how we could enlist people and community resources in improvement projects. From the slim budget, we had to choose low-cost items. Among the first things we chose was to slightly change the lunch menu, to thoroughly clean the entire building where the linoleum floors shone like glass, and continually pick up the trash (around the building that had high traffic sidewalks). We enlisted a parent to form a team to pick up the trash from around the building at least twice each week. Parents informed people of the improvements not to the curriculum, not to the leaking roof, not to the high drug traffic on the next block that often made its way to the playground, but to minor changes to which the community contributed. As a matter of fact, the community that partnered in gaining these minor improvements informed their friends and neighbors and drove a word-of-mouth campaign for school improvement.

Parents informed their friends and in the first year we doubled enrollment resulting in the raising of the revenue we needed to make minor capital improvements and expand the school’s services to offer before-and-after care. The school was located on Capitol Hill, and some of our parents were employees in the Senate Office Building. An excited parent told her boss—a U.S. senator—that our urban school needed new library chairs and equipment. I soon received a phone call from the senator’s chief of staff. He wanted to visit our school. Initially, I thought he sought a photo opportunity with Black children as it neared an election year. I nor many of the teachers in the school liked some of his policies. Nevertheless, we allowed the visit, of course the press visited,

and the senator sponsored the remodeling of our school library while also committing to sponsoring two children through payment of their tuition and fees. We gleaned a great deal of notice from this newly forged relationship. However, when the school chorus performed in a senate-sponsored program for disabled children we felt the gladness of giving back. The school community knew that we were no longer receivers but givers and full participators in our community. Our voice through service was now recognizable and we then moved forward as a legitimate partner and voice in the community.

Synergy Development

One of my developing strengths is enlisting diverse resources for a common cause. Currently, there are no palpable connections nor relationships between community structures and the congregation. There were some coincidental crossings between community projects and the church, but nothing permanent or formal. In addition, the church fails to set benchmarks for any of its projects. The church's council embraces the theoretical possibility of revitalization through trial and error and stabs in the dark.

Principal to revitalization is understanding that we are part of a whole; that connection and synergy with community carries significant value. The church was internally focused for many years. The purpose for church activities at Bowie was to create internal fellowship among the church members. Revitalization of the church is futile without the church's participation in the revitalization of the community. It seems that their growth should be interdependent as church and community share people and interests. While in-house fellowship is healthy, it is insufficient if it only serves to get together friends or like-minded people. Failing to utilize in-house fellowship to galvanize

members for outwardly focused mission misses the holistic greater purpose of fellowship. There should be some ambition to both go out and invite, to increase relationships with members of community, and to offer the resources we have to persons and entities beyond the church's walls. The objective of an instructional curriculum would be to deconstruct the dichotomous line between "them" and "us."

Contexts that support and perhaps even complement each other indeed made indelible marks on my life. I heard remarks from fellow ministers that point to their weariness in ministry work, that they "have a life," and that the context to which they are assigned is not their desired reality. For some, there seems to be such a strongly perceived polarization between life and work until it was said that the only way to escape work is to live one's life. There are times and situations where life and work seem immiscible. Like oil and water, there can be strong polarization between my life and the work and context to which I have been called. The proclamation that one "has a life" is somehow purposed to emphasize the stark contrast and dichotomy between life and work. Occasionally, I joined in this chorus and used this same train of thinking to separate my work from my life and give myself respite from work by living my life to ignore work or burying myself in my work to ignore life. Through this chapter I expect to find a meaningful convergence of the two.

I often consider that the context and I are bidirectional investors and collaborators in the life of each. This chapter presents risks that may address areas in my life that may not address the needs of this context. At the end of my first draft, I could detect some areas where my life and the immediate needs of my context are incompatible. I am sixty-six and raising two teenage granddaughters. My health is good, but my energy wanes. I

own a business for which I had to take more responsibility during the pandemic. I am a married half-time pastor. This context needs a full-time pastor to ambitiously execute anything. So, there are draw-backs and negatives. However, there are also positive aspects that may overshadow shortcomings and facilitate achieving success in this project.

I failed to merely stumble into this contextual space. Instead, I am convinced that it is the plan of God for my life. God knew of this and many other contexts where I was placed required leadership of those who identify as relationship builders. Material to relationship building is the insight that enables one to overcome obstacles such as resource limitations as well as those obstacles involving working with people with varying (and opposing) agendas, personalities, experiences, and philosophies. As the church, and even the broader neighborhood context, is in such desperation for revitalization in practically every area of its timid existence and considering its limited financial and human resources, I believe revitalization of our church is tightly connected to the church's connection with its community. Oftentimes community is viewed as mission ground, but for this project, I wish to highlight its propensity to be a powerful resource partner in the revitalization of the church. Therefore, I espouse the Huntington community as a prime resource for the ministry of church revitalization.

Though Bowie UMC has financial shortages, it owns property. With a revitalization effort, Bowie UMC can possibly play a huge part in providing open an unincumbered outdoor space and minimally occupied indoor space. Our church has two floors of space that are not used between Monday and Friday. Also, the community's public parking is limited, while our church owns two lots for parking. Other efforts for

branding that leads to the area's economic development could enlist the church without it having to make costly physical plant modifications. In conclusion, the church could inventory its physical plant to see how it could benefit the community without having to make capital improvements.

I am developing a neighborly relationship with the residents (men) of the halfway house. That house is part of our community. While they fail to visit the church often, I visit them. A few days after I arrived at Bowie UMC, I heard about the activity on the block. One day soon after, I walked down the street to talk to a few of the young men who stood in the middle of the street. They were extremely cordial and welcomed me to the church. They spewed out false promises to come to church that following Sunday, but there was a middle-aged man, who seemed to be tense about my exchange with these residents. Tom is a rather frail White man in his late forties who lived on the block all of his life. It seems that these young African American halfway house residents find themselves attached to him as opposed to him demanding their attention. They often cut his grass and wash his cars. I am not sure if they get paid for those services, but what may be their reward is sitting on his porch and talking to one another in the cool of the summer evening. Sometimes they get in the middle of his front yard and box. Sometimes it goes too far, and somebody gets badly hurt, and twice of my knowledge it really got out of hand to the point that someone inadvertently—and by grave mistake—hit this White man in whose yard they boxed. The ambulance came and took Tom to the hospital and kept him for a few days.

The next day, the church hosted a free community fish fry. A few of the guys came down to get fish dinners. Two stayed for quite a while and talked to the men of the

church while they fried and served fish. One came back the next day, Sunday, for parking lot service and he comes regularly. The men in the church were pleased that the fish dinners they prepared lured the men. They also touted the fish fry as mission outside the walls simply because it was held outside on the church parking lot. While technically they are correct, they remain challenged regarding broadening ministry outside the safety of the church property. That is, representing the church in venues in which they have little or no control. Instruction using an inquiry-based strategy should help us deconstruct and explore their understanding of church and community engagement, to help them determine the foundation of their timidity or reluctance to move beyond the church property for ministry.

Bowie UMC has various challenges, the kinds that would seem to prohibit sustaining a revitalization process. The congregation is markedly small. The resources are limited, particularly financial resources. The building needs repair, re-determination of space for functionality, and aesthetic attention. The congregation knows this as these concerns are visible. Only recently, in the COVID-19 pandemic, has attendance and offerings slightly increased thereby affording some hope of getting a few much-needed repairs done. Once the basic repairs are done, the plan is to create a scheme for better functionality for the building and minimal aesthetic improvements. This takes money, resources, and time that are currently in short supply at the church. My experience with taking a school that was about to close its doors to a place of enrollment and academic success can be an attribute I bring to the revitalization of Bowie UMC.

I found community building gratifying. Building community, creating cooperative spaces, programs, and relationships through integrating Bowie UMC and the Huntington

community will be beneficial for many and create a strong presence of the light of God in the area the church serves. I spent a few years in Detroit, Michigan on a street the neighbors called “Sweet Street.” Most of the people on a three linear block span were integrated into a “family” where people would contribute to the common good. I remember many days either I or someone else would contribute prepared food. There were neighbors—one whom I highlighted in my autobiography—that I and others often helped by feeding their children. This was long before public schools in Detroit began serving free breakfasts. From Christmas gatherings to summer block parties, the centerpiece of most of the neighborhood “family” activities was shared meals. This experience will help me contextualize curriculum around benevolence.

The advantage to community that could be tenured by interdenominational and interfaith understandings and partnerships is unrivaled by the internally minded insularity of a church that only participates in fellowship with itself and worse views itself as superior to other churches and faiths. Working with other faith groups and denominations on revitalization adds the currency of perspective that aids the church in crafting a diverse voice of revitalization, healing, prosperity, and growth that is relevant for the entire community—secular and religious. I can appreciate denominational perspective. I embrace Methodism out of my exposure and experience with other denominations. As a child, I belonged to my family’s Presbyterian church. As a young adult, I refused to belong to a church though I believed in God. Church failed to render good memories. So, for over twenty years I stayed away. Then I had a prophetic experience in an A.M. E. church in Maryland. I joined and every week the sermons shifted my faith further and

further to see how valuable church relationships and the unity of the people are to my spiritual growth.

I married a Catholic and thus converted. There I learned to read scripture and to understand and participate in Christian service and spiritual disciplines. Though I failed to embrace all the dogma (such as perpetual virginity and assumption of Mary), I had a deep appreciation for the Catholic Church's view of community and social justice. I later joined a Pentecostal church, which strengthened my view of the supernatural Force that chooses to empower and live among the natural. I witnessed miracle after miracle and invested my belief system in the power of God for the equipping of the saints to do more than common things—use the gifts of God for the good of the people. I began to weave my Presbyterian, non-church-attending, Catholic, Pentecostal self, and experience together to initiate the praxis of my faith through foreign mission. I spent a great deal of time in the summers working with teachers in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Prophecy, healing, mission, social justice, organization, miracles, spiritual discipline are all tools for community engagement and integral parts of any revitalization effort. I joined a Baptist Church that was close to my home and easy to visit. Though I was ordained in the Pentecostal church, in the Baptist church I launched my formal ministerial praxis. There I learned organization and protocol.

My nephew to whom I am very close became a Muslim. He, his wife, and their children would visit me from time to time and would pray and read their Holy Book. I would hear them in my family room having devotions but tried to ignore him until he read a passage that spoke to my heart. I began to read the Quran with them—not to become Muslim, but to extract from it the things I needed to have relationship with my

Muslim family members. I read with them to empower me to share experiences relatively with a semblance of understanding of their religious source and perspective, and—more importantly—with recognition of the wealth of faith-based wisdom they had to contribute.

The Baptist church I served as Associate Pastor commissioned me to plant a church in Westmoreland County, Virginia. There I learned how to ask for help and became lonely enough to open my eyes to the possibility of working outside the four walls for most of the ministry day. This wisdom was born of necessity, and it was replete with reward. Our church of seven energetic young professionals, four Generation Xers, and their baby boomer pastor set out in the community and set up satellite reading and math tutoring centers. Later, we began a Double Dutch team at the area's Section Eight housing complex. Then, with the blessing of the housing manager we rented the complex's recreation center for one dollar and held vacation Bible school there for eight consecutive summers. Our church's intended to be salt and light in that community. Subsequently, when I answered God's call to join the United Methodist Church and later to become a licensed local pastor, revitalization through galvanizing community was already a persistent desire running through my veins.

For this context, there is a need to build a team to enter the at-large community on a consistent basis. This requires human resources that are still in short supply in the church. Certainly, organizational prioritizing is important for us now. Burning people out with overzealous ideas and improper timing would be easy. Prophetic ministry has the propensity to do that. When the prophetic word is released, often those to whom it is sent do not carefully consider divine timing for the equipping, provision, and implementation

of the prophecy. Working toward the self-affirming prophecy of God is exciting. There are others in our church that have varied denominational and faith experiences. This may help us develop a more full-bodied view of community than we could without such denominationally diverse experience.

Conclusion

Some might call my context undesirable. With the naked eye that could seem plausible. However, the prophetic sense brings to bear witness that, "...nothing will be impossible with God" (Lk. 1:37 NRSV). When I arrived at Bowie UMC I saw a valley of dead-like bones. There were people who verbalized that they saw no purpose in or reason for changing or improving anything. They knew things failed to go well and that the church was in financial trouble. However, they thought it was a matter of fate that any well-wishing, programs, or prophetic action could not alter. In effect, they pronounced benediction on the church because they had the limited assumption that when they leave the church, whether walking or being rolled out with flowers, the church would not survive. They counted the few little gray heads that gently rose above the backs of the pews and decided that it would be useless to start anything new or do anything different. They measured the mounting sand at the bottom of the hourglass of their personal mortality that suggested that far too much mounted for them to be effective, necessary, or wanted in the revitalization of the church. Also, perhaps they looked at me coming through the door and thought that this Black woman could no more lead this traditionally White congregation into a state of revitalization than the box of assorted mugs stacked in a box behind the abandoned choir stand. They neglected to factor in the resurrecting and

restoring pneuma of God. Thus far, the church made marginal improvements in moving toward the idea that successful change for the church is possible, even despite its doubters and quite possibly in their lifetimes.

The hand of God began to change the hearts of the people from barren to expectant. To see the hand of God presently upon what seemed impossible is one of the greatest attestations one can have. In this context, I can both worker and witness; tenant and testifier. I have a life resume full of evidence of overcoming. I recognize the fact that my life of overcoming obstacles by the power of God informs my present context, and my obstacle-filled context informs my life.

Finally, it is important that community and the church feel the charge to inform each other. The church must influence the community and recognize that its work is crucial to the success of the community, although it may fail to always match the community's priorities identically. Though Jesus had a mission that differed from the world's he reached out to the world for partnership and the world was his community. The church is committed to show the light of God that they and others can eventually see with clarity.

With relevant conditions considered, there are strong indications that Huntington is on an upswing and standing at a threshold of renaissance. Bowie UMC has an incredible opportunity to not simply catch the wave but be part of the wave-making. However, the church must fully participate in the community's metamorphic renewal; it must act in a way benevolent to change. The congregation and I must be spiritually sensitive, resilient, appreciative of diversity, and present at the change table. I conclude that teaching and learning can best lead the congregation in finding meaning and in

strategizing how it can be light in community and make disciples through community engagement.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The term reconnaissance was mainly attributed to military science and particularly to the art of war. However, reconnaissance by its holistic definition was long part of practically every segment of society. Various social institutions employ reconnaissance as a strategic tool for activities such as land acquisitions, corporate take-overs and mergers, sales, and marketing, as well as institutional growth and development. Its purpose is inextricably linked to understanding the challenges outside its institutional borders for the purpose of lending and benefitting. The intent of this chapter is to explore how spiritual reconnaissance or spiritual mapping—probably a less ominous term—can be a beneficial tool for local churches to understand and work in their at-large communities.

Reconnaissance is information-gathering and sometimes on-site determination of the relevance of information to an expected and future report. When the church maps its community, it views the landscape depending on what the church comes equipped by faith to see. Reconnaissance brings physical and spiritual information to the church about the community's diabolical and virtuous aspects. Is the mapping faith-centered? If so, it becomes spiritual mapping and is useful for assessing and identifying the needs and assets of a community according to what it naturally witnesses and what it witnesses by

the faith it engages. Upon the shoulders of both natural and faith influenced quantitative and qualitative appraisal of community the Church's successful mission strategies are constructed. Operating without faith in God who sends the Church into the world and without faith in God's prophetic and purposeful positioning of the local church, would reduce mapping to the dismal act of simply gathering information for secular purposes. However, the Church is called to go into the world to do work wherein faith is a dominant strategy. The Church is called to make disciples intentionally and strategically (Mt. 28:19).

The church did this to a degree—albeit haphazardly—and with a solitary goal of increasing membership numbers. The church constructed programs and initiatives, and incorporated gimmicks and pseudo-community missions that may feed people while not knowing the people they feed. There becomes no real interest in knowing the physical, social, spiritual, and economic landscape of the people who drive past the church.

One could say that mapping is unnecessary to engage the community, and it is not critical to understanding the community. However, what happens if such information is material to the spiritual life of community? That is, what if natural conditions in a community are a result of spiritual influence that precludes the community's growth and vitality? The Christian faith informs Christians that there are things unseen and that there is a spiritual value to this world that one must consider and weigh as a cost to do the business of the Kingdom of God in community.

Numbers 13:17-33 narrates a reconnaissance effort that God orders and Moses commands. Twelve men are assigned to represent each of their twelve tribes to survey the land and return to Moses with a report. They survey the land and the overwhelming

majority return with a dismal report, which warns Moses and the others that the “land” is unsafe to pursue. These reporters surmise that the barriers and roadblocks and threats are too great for them.

This chapter will not argue the accuracy of the report of what the spies see with their natural eyes. It will, however, exegetically investigate the text as foundational to the hypothesis that spiritual mapping is a critical tool for the growth and revitalization of the church. Intelligence-gathering is primary to the implementation of spiritual gifts to address the problematic spiritual conditions of church communities and secular systems that have bearing on the people living in the communities the Church serves. Additionally, spiritual mapping gives initial direction on a clear plan of action and frugal use of resources—particularly time.

Further, this chapter will examine the social context and historical tradition connected to the subject text and will generally map the road the people of the narrative take to arrive at the current place and time. The chapter will also discuss source criticism of the text and consider the use of literary techniques, particularly the use of metaphorical implications of the names of the inhabitants of Canaan and how their names connect them to the reconnaissance.

Historical Analysis

Before it is practical to fully consider the subject text at hand, it is necessary to follow the trajectory of events that led up to this text. Such events are inextricably connected to the situation in which Moses and Israel find themselves. The spy story is connected to events that inform their purpose and benefit their understanding of why faith

and spirituality are such important components of their mission. Faith and spirituality are so integrally bound to the subject of the text that without them one would lose the value of the mission and text that describes among insignificant and parenthetical stories of historical exploration and dreams of manifest destiny.

In Genesis, God initiates a contractual spiritual obligation to Abraham. This was not chiefly about ancestral identification or perpetuity of generations, but God's interest in gaining a people who understood salvation and who could be an example of salvation birthed the obligation. God's deliverance of a people who is faithful, trusting, and loyal to God to a place of ultimate prosperity—a land flowing with milk and honey— would exemplify the Old Testament typology of salvation.

Genesis chapter seventeen initiates the Abrahamic Covenant, an agreement for relationship between God and the children of Abraham. God follows the establishment of the covenant and presents Abraham with a list of promises and requirements for their covenantal relationship. God promises Abraham a legacy of descendants (Gn. 17:2) and prosperous land (Gn. 17:6). As part of the covenant, God declares, "I will be their God," which infers Israel's spiritual and natural connection with God. As well, the promise he makes to Abraham encompasses future generations.¹

For the sake of showing the perpetual nature of the Genesis Abrahamic Covenant and its parallelism with the subject text, it is fair to say that every generation had challenges that would, if possible, preclude them from satisfying the covenantal relationship between Abraham and God. This chapter will not visit each patriarch and his personal catalogue of challenges. However, there was distrust of God, deceit, and

¹ All biblical citations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Genesis 17:8.

consistent with the focal text from the book of Numbers, there was rebellion against God in the shape of lacking spiritual vision among the people God delivered from Egypt. Yet, God remained steadfastly loyal and intent on fulfilling the Covenant and enlisting Israel's active participation. Thus, God's plan for entrance into the Promised Land was strategic as it included the effort of the people as well as the divine leadership and intervention of God.

The Covenant continued generationally and was emphatically repeated to the leadership of Israel. As a result of the cry of Israel while suffering under the oppression of taskmasters, God appears in a burning bush and reiterates the covenant to Moses (Ex. 3:7-8). The oppressed people then embark on a dramatic, supernatural escape from Egyptian captivity to subsequently entering a setting for faith formation and behavior modification. God repeats the covenant at Sinai (Ex. chapter nineteen). As one moves closer into the subject text, one leaves behind the first population census that seems to be the sign of the formation of a national spiritual identity. The census serves as an effort to organize the people and enumerate them according to their tribes. Israel lost a great deal of spiritual identity in Egypt. In a paternal way, God not only assigns them a restored identity, but urges them to embrace the covenantal identity as the children of God.

Numbers is essential in characterizing the spiritual journey toward salvation. Numbers chapter thirteen is indispensable in forming the matrix on which a Judeo-Christian idea of salvific faith is born. Additionally, it is the place of potential and where there could be decisive victory or failure. As part of a narrative continuum, the spy story seems to be the pivotal mid-point posited in time and location between the Israelite's

exodus from Egypt and their entrance into Canaan; their exit from bondage to the entrance into the promise of God.

Place and time identification is critical to the general understanding of the wide eyeshot of Israel's wilderness journey and transition. Scholars such as Johannes Hempel and Albrecht Alt cast doubt on the geographical validity of Canaan in Numbers and Joshua, asserting that, "the geographical information contained in these books cannot, in their opinion, be thought to represent any ancient 'knowledge' about the land of the Canaanites."² As an Ancient Eastern narrative, there are variants among scholars about the year in which it takes place. Some contend that, "I Kings 6:1 designates 480 years from the Exodus to Solomon's dedication of the temple. The dedication was 966. That makes the Exodus 1446."³ Others hold that, "The 480 years is most likely 12 generations (12x40=480). In actuality, a generation was about 25 years, making the actual figure about 300."⁴ Nevertheless, the uncertainty of its precise date has little if any power to soften the gist of the spy story.

After the experience at Sinai, Israelites under the leadership of Moses moved toward Kadesh (also called Paran) from which their spy mission launches. Whether Israel remained in Kadesh for the post-rebellion thirty-eight years of wandering is an unsettled matter. However, the land is near three springs that provide for grazing.⁵ This provided a

² Niels Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, ed. John R. Spencer (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1991), 64.

³ John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1994), 103, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴ Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, 103.

⁵ *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Kadesh," 9, <https://libguides-thedtl-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/c.php?g=1079122>.

pastoral people resource for maintaining life and may have been a reason the people perhaps were not anxious to enter Canaan. Oddly, the possibilities of remaining in Kadesh or even entertaining an ostensible idea of returning to their oppressive lifestyle in Egypt perhaps seemed real to them.

The *Key Word Study Bible* describes Kadesh as “a place associated with defeat, failure, and death for the nation of Israel during its wilderness wandering.”⁶ The literary analysis section of this chapter examines irony more, but a major point of irony here is that this location, a place of challenge, is the point from which the spies are to launch their mission (which connotes God’s intent on supernatural deliverance in this mission). Already living in a place representing defeat, the spies would return and without factoring in God’s participation they describe their mission destination as an unconquerable place.

The narrative takes place during the late Bronze Age.⁷ The spies’ mission lasts forty days. After Moses’ selection of tribal leaders, they are to engage in the mapping out of Canaan and return to Moses to report specifically on the quality and vitality of the land, how the towns are protected, and the condition of the people who are residents. Moses failed to command them to conquer Canaan, but he sends them to return with intelligence indicating that they would need the same Yahweh who delivered them from Egypt to deliver them into the promise. They are to certify and bear witness that all that God described to them about the land is indeed true. From a spiritual perspective, they

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1996), 173.

⁷ Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2254, ProQuest Ebook Central.

are sent to test their own fear and doubt and their own uncertainty about a system outside their historical tradition.

The account of the journey from Egypt to Canaan is strategic in not only securing new residential territory for Israel, but to secure the heart of the people for God. Moses is the leader of the journey. He is a prayerful intermediary between Israel and God though he eventually suffers demise alongside a generation of the people he leads out of Egypt.

In the wilderness, God forges their identity. A wider perspective of the subject text includes and cannot ignore the influence of wilderness events indicating that God not only chose a people but now molds a “nation” of people to manifest the promise. Moses often interceded for these people and God responded as a disciplinarian who with compassion understood a people subjugated to Egyptian oppression. However, as the Israelites move closer to the promise, God tightens the rope around sin and rebellion, and raises the bar for faith and obedience through appropriating rules for deprogramming them from Egyptian slavery and forming them into a people of promise.

The historical context is all but static. Verse seventeen begins with Moses’ announcement of the command of Yahweh for a leader of each of the twelve tribes to explore the hill country and Negev. God commands that they take inventory of a series of facets of the land. Interestingly, they are to bring back fruit the land and its people’s produce. They found grapes, pomegranates, and figs at Eschol perhaps as evidence of the condition of the vigor and fertility of the land. As instructed, the spies bring back a cluster of grapes that required two men to transport. Thus, the vitality of the soil is apparent.

God commissions the spies to not only assess the land, but to observe the inhabitants among whom are the Amalekites who Israel had previously engaged in an encounter. Their presence could have very much spun the spies into a spiral of fear and intimidation though Israel previously defeated them. The Amalekites caused Israel grief as they launched an attack against Israel (Ex. 17:8). Deuteronomy chapters seventeen through eighteen recaps the event describing the Amalekites as dishonest as they usurped Israel who was weary from a journey. Additionally, some propose that the Amalekites committed economic injustices as they protected their exclusive access and participation in the trade route between Arabia and Egypt.⁸ The spies return to announce the presence of the sons of Anak who, incidentally, Caleb later defeats (Jgs. 1:20). The listing of the “ites” appears in a diametrically opposed position to the listing of the tribes of Israel and could serve as an assertion of stark contrast between the faithful and the untrusting, God’s power and human power as well as the supernatural and natural.

Further, there is a contrast of perception where ten of the spies’ assessment of the land is “evil” (Nm. 13:32) and renders the comparative strength between natural and spiritual perception. Caleb, later joined by Joshua, attempts to inspire the ten spies who have an evil report regarding whether Israel could indeed overcome the inhabitants of Canaan. Considering their miraculous deliverances from Egypt, it is reasonable that the spies would recognize the supernatural and spiritual value of the land before them. Conversely, the spies are so overcome with fear that they misinterpret and mis-relay what they see and failed to consider the fact that Israel’s military far exceeded the military power of Canaan. The ten persisted with their negative report and assessment of the

⁸ *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Kadesh,” 9, <https://libguides-thedtl-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/c.php?g=1079122>.

viability to conquer what they see. The twelve see the same things yet ten of them render extremely different perspectives than Caleb and Joshua, consequently different interpretations, and subsequently a different recommendation.

This is not an unreasonable assumption. God showed them signs and unveiled God's character to them, and God now expects them to see through the lens of faith, the product of a spiritual economy. As tools of God (or even more ambitious as partners) Israel would accomplish the divine will and bring salvation to Israel to complete God's mission of leading a people into their divine destiny. The commands God places on the people hinge on the assumption that the people dwelled with God, God was their leader long enough to gain their trust, and they could see through a spiritual lens. Instead, the twelve hand-picked tribal leaders go out to spy the land, but ten leaders return citing what they see with their natural eyes but not with their faith. They refuse to embrace and apply to what they see the spiritual phenomenology of their experience with God. The spies give little to no credit to nor do they center their efforts around God as their leader and guide.

J. W. Pritchett offers a sobering message, he writes "A theocentric spirituality necessarily undermines the attempt of human beings to live as though they were gods. Without a theocentric spirituality, we can never overcome our "low" motivations and will inevitably "impose [our] own laws and interests on reality in our effort to save ourselves."⁹ Pritchett's observation speaks to the entanglement of what one sees with how one assesses one's own power to engage in what one sees. Reactions to what one

⁹ Justin William Pritchett, "Cultivating Wilderness: A Phenomenological Theology of Wilderness Spirituality and Ethics," PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2018, 212, https://abdn.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery/44ABE_INST:44ABE_VU1/12152618690005941?lang=en.

perceives correlates with what one believes about oneself. The spies fail to see themselves and this post-slavery position as the sum of the faith of humanity and the power of God. seemingly, they fail to understand that such a sum is superior to the strength of the inhabitants of Canaan or any adversary to the will of God. However, such a persuasion is impossible with a natural view but without a spiritual assessment.

Conceiving that they see what they see with their natural eyes is possible. However, the reality is that a covenantal promise between God and humankind incorporates more than natural assessment. It requires the subjection of natural observation to the value of a spiritual covenant where spiritual implication tenures the true and accurate potential of what one sees naturally. Spirituality is not simply an asset but is the aim of the Covenant. Thus, the Covenant is material in forging the spiritual and ethical condition of Israel. The spy mission was to lead the “nation” to a more advanced level of spirituality. Barton places emphasis on the spirituality of the Covenant as a correlate of ethics. He writes that

The potentialities of this covenant for ethical and spiritual advance lay in part in the fact that at the moment it was not put in written form but was committed to tradition. That it was not at once committed to writing is clear from the wide divergence of opinion in later times as to what the real content of the covenant was.¹⁰

Not only is spirituality intimated to be a correlate of the Covenant, but it was to produce a God-desired result. The reconnaissance, then, as an activity of the Covenant would require the inclusion of a component that acknowledges the aim of the Covenantal exploit—spiritual maturity.

¹⁰ George A. Barton, *Moses and the Covenant with Yahweh in the Religion of Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928), 56-74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv4v3048.8>.

Literary Criticism

The spy story is in the center of the Sinai covenant and continues Israel's efforts toward faith formation but ends in the downward spiral of Israel's distrust in God of the covenant. The Numbers chapter thirteen narrative centers around and utilizes the literary convention of cause and effect where Israel's disobedience draws Moses' intervention, which often compels God's mercy. However, in the instance of this text, there is cause and effect where the behavior of Israel negatively affects Moses' future and draws God to act in punitive judgment. Here, cause and effect employ Israel's refusal to remember the blessings and providence of God in the Sinai desert and in turn all, but Joshua and Caleb are punished by death. These who died fail to view their futures with the faith that should have been forged through the acts of a benevolent God. They are rearward in their vision, they long for Egypt, and disregard the Covenant-driven possibility God articulates to deliver them.

Literary Analysis

Due to uncertain source documentation of Numbers chapter thirteen, it would be appropriate to assume that its linguistic formations were subject to perpetual development and thus were diachronic from the promise made to Abraham to the moment in which the Israelites find themselves at Kadesh. As well, it would be fair to say the spirit of the promise remained as stationary in meaning and intensity as it was in its initial form. Additionally, there is some doubt regarding the genre of the Torah as historical. Its synthesis is less chronological than substantively meaningful. Angela Roskop, in *The Wilderness Itineraries: Genre, Geography, and the Growth of Torah*, explains that date

formulas, which are glaringly absent in the wilderness narrative, characterize historical texts in that “Aside from a partial date in Num 20:1 marking the arrival of the people at Kadesh, the only other date formulas mark their entry into the land...”¹¹ The absence of such dates lends to the motive of the writer to engage in less of a historical account than a historically-influenced spiritual narrative. Furthermore, Roskop employs the term, “itinerary genre,” favoring the journey and movement over the time stamps.¹²

The portability of the tabernacle tent illustrates that Israel is a transient people. The setting up and dedication of the tabernacle symbolizes God’s presence in every place of their journey, God’s partnership with Israel (Numbers chapter seven), and the hopefulness leading into Numbers chapter thirteen characterized by the preparedness to move forward. The covenantal relationship Israel has with God ideally suggests that the spy narrative is a literary journey. However, when determining genre, the eventuality of failure, spiritual decline, and death of a generation paints a contrasting picture that points sternly to tragedy.

The symbolism of the title “Numbers” represents the order of preparation and arrangement made to equip the spies to move into the Promised Land. The community was arranged in a methodical manner and created a theocentric culture that acknowledged God at the center of their corporate life and culture. Gordon Wenham lends an explanation of this theocentric community.

Here symbolism is very important. At the centre of the camp stood the tabernacle where God was enthroned above the ark in the holy of holies. Round the tabernacle camped the priests and Levites, guarding it to prevent ordinary Israelites entering without careful preparation. Beyond the Levites camped the

¹¹ Angela Roskop, *The Wilderness Itineraries: Genre, Geography, and the Growth of Torah* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2011), 3, ProQuest Ebook.

¹² Roskop, *The Wilderness Itineraries*, 6.

secular tribes, drawn up in battle order as befits the people of God. Outside the camp lived the unclean, sufferers from skin diseases or bodily discharges, who were unfit for the presence of God.¹³

Though the Tabernacle was at the center, it is exclusive and spiritual in the part it plays in the spy mission. The priestly tribe of Levi is noticeably absent from the reconnaissance. The priests, therefore, are not involved in this activity of the mission. The text incorporates literary conventions such as symbolism, motifs, irony, and hyperbole. There is the use of symbolism that lends itself to the strong significance of the spiritual aspect of the journey. Natural features of the journey inform spiritual possibilities and revelation. The people, fortifying walls, fruit, landforms, and Canaan's proximity to water have metaphoric meaning that point to a prophetic purpose for the journey. Also, the text speaks to the spirituality of their journey where a tabernacle can represent an unseen God. The spies fail to operate with such a concept in mind but would only assign natural and emotional value to their survey in Canaan. Forgetting the spiritual value of the reconnaissance was like being blind to the Tabernacle around which they lived; it was the nucleus of their tradition and society. Their preview of the Promised Land was intensely tied to the Tabernacle that was symbolic of the God of the promise. Instead, the spies and subsequently the community fall into a space of myopia that blurs their spiritual vision and leads to their return to complaining and rebellion.

The rebellion motif is stratified throughout Israel's wilderness experience so that by the time they arrive at Kadesh, they master murmuring and complaining. As a motif, rebellion indicates just how much their oppressors influence Israel, how much oppression conditions them, and how they are willing to vacate the covenant with the God of

¹³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 247, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Abraham. The text is a straightforward narrative describing a strategic command given to the nomadic people. Persons would no longer view these people as a recklessly wandering nomadic people but an organized national body with a covenant, a mission, and a God who keeps promises. logically one would expect that God would win the confidence of Israel through the miraculous release of Israel from Egyptian bondage alone. However, murmuring and complaining is the commonplace behavior among these sojourners who quickly forget their prior enslavement.

The introduction of the Book of Numbers connotes Israel's posture of rising, hopefulness, and expectation. The naming of the tribes and calling of each tribe's leader (Nm. 13:1-9) sustains an upbeat and optimistic tone of identity, preparation, posterity, and life. Nevertheless, such sanguinity pivots to a place of apprehension that ironically steers the leaders who Moses commands to "Go up" (Nm. 13:17) to the tragedy of a "wicked report" and subsequent rebellion. In turn, the spies' mutiny against the lucid evidence of the intent of God's contract to deliver them into a land flowing with milk and honey sets Israel back forty years and cuts off an entire generation from realizing the promise.

Certainly, the mission is no secret as the spies spend forty days in the open taking inventory. They fail to attempt to conceal their activities, which in any event would be difficult with such a large party.¹⁴ Their mission included not simply summarizing the prosperity reminiscent of milk and honey, but to verify for themselves and Moses that Canaan possesses the components of what one could consider an agrarian utopia. Unearthed ancient Canaanite literature reveals stories and Canaanite religious claims that

¹⁴ Iain M. Duguid, "Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory," in *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 167.

parallel biblical literature, namely the presence of deities among whom is Baal—the god of vegetation.¹⁵ The presence of a vegetation god may connect, albeit loosely, with the evidence of Canaan’s fruitfulness. This could suggest a theological construct for Yahweh’s dominance over creation (the physical world) and over Baal (the diabolical spiritual world).

Not only does the intent of the surveillance include getting a picture of what is in Canaan, but to assess Israel’s ability, as God’s nation, to possess Canaan. There are glaring discrepancies in the text around the condition of the land, the geography of the space to survey, and who defends the God-willed move into Canaan. First, there is the question of an accurate report. The initial report in verse twenty-seven reveals that “it does flow with milk and honey” (Nm. 13:27) and the exhibition of large grapes as evidence follows the initial report. In contrast, the assessment verse thirty-two reports is less hopeful in claiming, “The land we explored devours those living in it” (Nm. 13:32). The use of exaggeration or hyperbole relates the unfounded fear of engaging people with whom Israel was in combat. One could not reasonably attribute the second claim to the war but has an agricultural tone. This claim is in syncopation with Ezekiel 36:8 that says, “but you, O mountains of Israel, shall put forth your branches and bear your fruit for my people Israel.”¹⁶

The text is less an ethnocentric record of flattering legacy than a revelation of the lack of vision and most importantly the need for a faith-affected assessment of Canaan.

¹⁵ *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Canaanites,” 538, <https://libguides-thedtl-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/c.php?g=1079122.n>.

¹⁶ Itamar Kislev, “Joshua (and Caleb) in the Priestly Story and Joshua’s Initial Appearance in the Priestly Source: A Contribution to an Assessment of the Pentateuchal Priestly Material,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (2017): 39, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A491311291/AONE?u=upl1179&sid=AONE&xid=1f71c7e6>.

To rescue its ethnocentric dignity, however, there are two written versions of the story. The Numbers chapter thirteen version credits Caleb for attempting to still the spies and convince them of the surety of the Covenant and the power of God to deliver. The third contradiction creates a tension between the first and second version; that is, between chapters thirteen and fourteen. Chapter thirteen cites Caleb as the sole spy who has a dissenting opinion regarding whether Israel could conquer Canaan. Believing Israel with God would be victorious in moving into Canaan, one could see Caleb as a priestly type siding with Moses. However, Caleb was an outsider—the son of Jephunneh and member of the Kenizzites who, according to Genesis 15:19, inhabits the land given to Abraham. Interestingly, Numbers 13:6 names Caleb as a member of the tribe of Judah. Moses renames Joshua, an act often signifying a different status and role (as Abram and Joshua were renamed to indicate their relationship with God’s promise).

Sweeney writes that “Viewed diachronically, these observations suggest a Judean narrative critical of the northern tribes that has been edited to rescue the character of Hosea/Joshua ben Nun and to work the narrative into a larger literary framework that views Joshua as the successor of Moses who led Israel into the promised land.”¹⁷ The Numbers chapter fourteen account redeems a priestly rendering as it sets Joshua with Caleb. The implication of roll-calling the names of the inhabitants of Canaan is to accentuate the historical discord the sons of Anak in addition to the discord that the Amalakites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites had with Israel. Essentially, Yahweh makes the point that the assets of those who afflicted Israel in the past will be

¹⁷ Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Tanak as the Foundation of Judaism,” in *TANAK: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2012), 3-4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt22nm69v>.

delivered into their hands. Part of the theological implication is that God not only calls them to march into their promise, but God is an agent of their success.

Noth writes that “According to P, the sending out of the twelve ‘spies’ results from an express command of Yahweh (Nm. 13.2a). P consistently makes the divine guidance of Israel. From such a standpoint a prior human reconnoitering of the land that was to be possessed was indispensable.”¹⁸ Thus, it is likely that the spies ignore this feature when making their report. They fail to approach the analysis with spiritual eyes. Characteristic of tradition-driven historical accounts is the propensity for subjective authoring or claiming that is complimentary to the tradition. Abraham Malamat argues that innate in historical criticism from a biblical tradition, are conditions where, “all the available direct evidence is self-testimony – internal evidence, both subjective and ethnocentric.”¹⁹ This could very well be the case for the Numbers chapter thirteen spy story except it lacks features that flatter or show Israel in a good light. Instead, the details and sentiment of the narrative expose Israel’s unfaithfulness, ingratitude, and—most troubling—the loss of a generation’s place in the land of promise and the remnant’s profitless roaming for nearly forty years.

Post-colonial analysis of the spy story could render a suspicion about tactics and reporting of the mission. Viewing the reconnaissance command as a violation of Israel’s right to determine her life is possible. Additionally, a post-colonial reading could very well produce empathy for the inhabitants of Canaan as well as for the Israelites who

¹⁸ Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1969), 103, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁹ Abraham Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel: Major Problems and Minor Issues*, vol. 7, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central.

reject leaving the wilderness. Jione Havea offers a cynical post-colonial view of Israel in Numbers chapter thirteen. Havea writes

I invite appreciation of the wilderness as land, in protest against the naïve assumption that the wilderness is not as worthy as the promised land of Canaan. In fact, according to Num. 13, while several spies see Canaan as containing many fruits and blessings, they do not want to fight for the land. They appreciate Canaan, but they prefer the wilderness.²⁰

This post-modern claim draws in an added socio-political view of the text that if not interpreted carefully has the propensity to set post-colonial and traditional readings at odds. However, such a post-colonial reading reveals the spirit of the text by providing a rhema-influenced meaning. Such meaning may seem to be complicated but nonetheless requires both a natural and spiritual reckoning.

Summary

Numbers chapter thirteen has several components that lead to its relevance to a doctoral project regarding spiritual mapping for the purpose of community service and mission. Certainly, the narrative involves practices and strategies that are uncommon in a contemporary ethos that watches for invasion of privacy and encroachment of any kind. However, as a physician assesses a patient before building a strategy of health and wellness, so a church should assess its community.

The mission of the Church is to bring spiritual health and life wholeness to the world. Some may be cynical about this charge in that people who themselves are candidates for healing and wholeness comprise the Church. As the Israelites were a

²⁰ Jione Havea, "Numbing Numbers: Land and People of the Wilderness," in *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*, ed. Hemchand Gossai (London, UK: T and T Clark, 2018), 62, <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.5040/9780567680976.0010>.

broken and unsettled people, so are people in the Church. The caveat, however, is that the Church has a partner and progenitor who's supernatural being transcends human disorder and offers the organized body of believers the Holy Spirit through which one can accomplish supernatural feats. Zachariah captures this sentiment when he speaks to Zerubbabel, "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty" (Zec. 4:6). That the imperfections of individuals in the Church do not preclude the Church from acting strategically for God is essential. With the notion of human imperfection addressed, it is also important to note that the church is expected to fulfil the Great Commission as much as the reconnaissance described in Numbers chapter thirteen. Naming the twelve "spies" is a matter of interpretation as the NIV refers to them as "leaders." Thus, according to the text, the reconnaissance mission is entrusted to leaders, perhaps because they are privileged to consult with Moses and are at the forefront of their clan's engagement in the wilderness.

The church in community is the exercise of God's wisdom. When churches are placed among other institutions and entities, it is imperative for her to understand her relationship, but more important to gain an understanding of the people and the spiritual "-ites" that affect their life and institutions. The Amalekites were one such spiritual entity that in the text are hostile to community. Identifying and understanding diabolical entities in community helps the church and the community to formulate strategies and design practices focused on addressing the community's social dysfunction.

Every community experience crisis of some sort. The underlying force is not simply natural but has a spiritual component. A foundational cohort of this understanding is 1 Corinthians 15:46 that not only indicates the two-fold character of the world, but also

names in what order they appear. Therefore, a spiritual infrastructure that labors to navigate the people and communities without interference from an opposing spirit supports visible societal ills and progress. The spies are to detect this spiritual nature of Canaan. Instead, they maintain a one-dimensional stance that ignores the very rich and the useful tools of the Holy Spirit.

One can conclude that churches work diligently to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless, thus preaching the Gospel. Yet, many who work tirelessly feel that their work is futile because they witness no real change in community. This may be the result of improper or inadequate assessment of their communities; that is identifying the less obvious and underlying spiritual workings in their spaces.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: Expansionism and Manifest Destiny

This chapter presents the history of American Westward Expansion as it correlates with the socio-economic development of America. Noting that while American Westward Expansion is paired with and engrafted into the narrative of American progression, its character failed to originate with pioneering America is important. Expansion was a practice reaching back to ancient times.¹ However, forasmuch as American expansionism duplicates many other prior global expansionism efforts, this chapter focuses on the specific displacement of people germane to the nineteenth century in America, specifically that which the ideology of manifest destiny drives. This chapter discusses the cooperative intent of Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny, and how the intent and subsequent actions played a role in marginalizing and disenfranchising people. The movement of this chapter will be chronological, weaving in and out of sub-movements and events that will help bring understanding to the adoption of Manifest Destiny to build a nation.

¹ G. Gaddis Smith and Robert H. Ferrell, s.v. "Manifest Destiny," *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, ed. Howard R. Lamar (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-2, https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/americanwest/manifest_destiny/0?institutionId=8909.

“Democratic Review” editor turned politician John O’Sullivan coined the phrase Manifest Destiny. It emerged from an 1839 article, “The Great Nation of Futurity” written in the “Review.” In grandiloquent rhetorical style the article captures the sacred impetus for Westward Expansion by stating that “The far-reaching the boundless future, will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High – the Sacred and the True.”²

Author Julius Pratt secures the phrase “manifest destiny” to the authorship of O’Sullivan by citing it as generously used in the “Democratic Review” and subsequently the “Morning News,” both published under O’Sullivan’s editorship.³ Many expansionist efforts in America preceded the coinage of the phrase—from the settling of the first colonists throughout the formation of central governing powers. There will be a need to reference or perhaps broadly describe these precedents as groundwork for the immediate discussion. However, the period predominantly covered by the analysis herein commences at the 1845 annexation of Texas, the point at which Manifest Destiny was no longer simply conceptual but concretely posited in the culture of Western Expansion.

² John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 6, no. 23 (November 1839): 426-430.

³ Julius W. Pratt, “John L. O’Sullivan and Manifest Destiny,” *New York History* 14, no. 3 (1933): 213-34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24470589>.

The Promised Land and White Privilege

Historically, Manifest Destiny is a type of Promised Land ideology used to justify expansionism and the White race as object of its benefit. For the American pioneer, such destiny is divinely ordered and justified by the divine right to possess territory used by or belonging to someone else. Also, in the formation of the nation it fueled an aggressive drive toward White exceptionalism that accommodates racial supremacy and dominance. The diverse means of possession incorporated education, religion, economics, and physical violence. Strategies included the weakening or reconstruction of native culture, demanding displaced people adhere to White cultural practices, religious indoctrination, and the physical disruption of natives' land.

Ironically, while European settlers unapologetically inserted their culture and influence into the newly "discovered" frontier, they wanted separation from Europe. The Monroe Doctrine was one policy that articulated the sentiments of these settlers. The Doctrine's central sentiment—that European influence should be removed from the neighborhood of the United States—manifested itself in the nation's actions well before President James Monroe put the sentiment on paper in 1823. By then experience showed that a capital way of reducing the influence of European states was to annex their American territories to the United States.

The impetus for expansionism is often articulated as the planters having to relocate due to the irritability of the soil in Virginia in accommodating years of tobacco planting. Another reason for expansion was the plight of ordinary White folks seeking to upgrade their class statuses. So, each class stratification fixed their eye on the frontier line that divided them from the west of the Mississippi. It seemed the British drew the line to

preserve its interest in the new world, but colonists and frontiersmen later see such a line as an invitation for opportunity.

As White loyalists departed from the States, the 1783 Treaty of Paris allowed them to legally “recover lost property,” though in practice the states would not comply.⁴ The states’ denial of rights afforded to citizens via statutes and other legal documents would turn out to be a common practice, particularly as it applies to the rights afforded to native peoples and slaves. This chapter examines how policy and practice took different paths. Persons created legislation only for some to violate such legislation due to the lust for dominance that Manifest Destiny created. The American government soothed its conscience through the establishment of legislation, rules, provision for the displaced while it put into practice—both overtly and covertly—the ideology of the divinely bestowed privilege of Whites to take territories and maintain authority over them.

The history of America is more than a string of events, but it is the narrative connected to the intent of a people to follow what they believed was their God-provided calling and privilege to occupy and maintain control of a continent. American history leading up to 1845 is replete with movement—migration and immigration. Some movement was beneficial, and some was not. Though American history often commences with the 1492 Columbus discovery (claims that enjoined Spain to America), English settlers failed to appear on American soil in Jamestown until 1607. Thirteen years later, the continent expanded as English Pilgrims settled at Plymouth. Within the same century,

⁴ Reginald C. Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 4, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=3039446>.

the South experienced efforts of expansionism as Pueblo peoples drove the Spanish from the territory now named New Mexico. In 1718, the French found Louisiana.

Challenges to Expansionism

Expansion was not without contention. In 1756, the French and Indian War was waged over claims to the upper Ohio River Valley. Twenty years later American Thirteen Colonies, in opposition to the British, engaged in the American Revolutionary War initiating the Colonies' independence from British rule and preventing the future annexing of American soil. Settlers who claimed to have exclusive divine rights were the only ones to possess the soil. Though there were fundamental differences in social thought and industry, North and South both embraced expansionisms. Cotton growers and plain folks of the South and intellectuals of the North were united about extending the ideal of manifest destiny from "Sea to Shining Sea." President Tyler publicly embraced the idea of the nation-extending from shore to shore. Morrison writes that "In 1832 he had maintained that the destiny of America was to expand to the Pacific, 'walking on the waves of the mighty deep...overturning the strong places of despotism and restoring man to his lost rights.'"⁵

Enculturation and Power

Over the next three-quarters of a century, massive initiatives took place that pointed to the progressive expansion of American territory. The Northwest Ordinance

⁵ Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 15, ProQuest Ebook Central.

paved the way toward securing land east of the Mississippi and toward western territories joining the states. With such aggressive expansion, it became necessary to remove any real or perceived obstacles to creating a utopic union. In 1830, Congress passed the Removal Act, mandating the deportation of American Indian tribes to West of the Mississippi.⁶ This became the first sign that settlers had little to no intention of blending with other people groups or even living near them. In the *Review*, O'Sullivan made it clear that mere annexation of land was not the only desire of expansionists. He describes in a somewhat ambiguous narrative a nefarious agenda to enjoin California to the collection of American states. He describes the Mexican government as “imbecile and distracted” and incapable of governing California from a Mexican central government so geographically distant.⁷ California's separation from Mexico followed his grim assessment of Mexico's capabilities.

Separation from Mexico left Mexico vulnerable to White enculturation and displacement of its native residents. Displacement is markedly different from migration in that it fails to have the same intent. Its aim was to not only move persons to give space for land development but to divide communities of native peoples, to dilute their cultural bonds and dissipate their communal connection and permanency.

In his book, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Frederick Jackson Turner asserts each new frontier is informed by those that preceded it. Lessons learned about populations either vexed or validated the spirit of the frontier. The frontier

⁶ Howard Roberts Lamar, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 9.

⁷ John O'Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no. 1 (July-August 1845): 5-6, 9-10.

was pushed further to the west. New frontiers became old as new territory was claimed either by gun or money. In his journal article, “Science and Symbol in the Turner Frontier Hypothesis,” Johns Hopkins University science professor William Coleman offers criticism on the frontier’s dual meaning. He writes that “The frontier had done a noble work: it had created a free and prosperous nation. But this splendid creation, and indeed the very process of creation, had been sufficient cause for the destruction of the frontier. To this unfortunate event Turner could not remain indifferent.”⁸

The Treachery of the Frontier

The definition of the frontier depended on what it offered. Every eye cast upon the wide and open scape visualizes the frontier according to how and who it serves, and how the frontier fits into one’s expectations. The perception of the frontier compelled some to suffer pernicious paths to arrive at the fulfilled promise of peace, liberty, and freedom. In the fall of 1846, on their journey toward the great frontier, the Donner Party—a group of eighty-seven frontiersmen seeking to settle in California—found themselves as the unfavored guests of a snowy Sierra Nevada. Starvation and numbing cold took the lives of over half of the travelers. The others resorted to cannibalism as a means of survival.⁹ Narratives like this were common and indicative of the fervor and determination of those enchanted by the idea of a new frontier and the power therein.

⁸ William Coleman, “Science and Symbol in the Turner Frontier Hypothesis,” *The American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (1966): 24, doi:10.2307/1848169.

⁹ Ethan Rarick, *Desperate Passage: The Donner Party’s Perilous Journey West* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 181, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Shortly after the Donner Party found themselves involuntarily captive by the horrors of winter in the eastern ridge of California, President James K. Polk declared war on Mexico. Determined to be an immoral and unjustified war, intellectuals such as Concord, Massachusetts writer Henry David Thoreau objected as a matter of conscience. Thoreau, in his 1848 work *Civil Disobedience*, writes that the war was “the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.”¹⁰ Other intellectuals characterize Mexico as “a lamb being led to the slaughter.”¹¹ Certainly the fact that the Northeast’s economic success failed to directly depend on slavery dotted the sentiment of the Northeast. Horsman writes that “It may also be that New Englanders, who had no specific stake in the enslavement of blacks, as did the Southerners, or in the removal of Indians as did the Westerners, felt freer to indulge in mental doubts and humanitarian sentiments.”¹² Thoreau’s thoughts mirrored many other New Englanders’ such as Emerson. However, it is questionable as to whether Thoreau’s principled objection was to slavery or to unjust war.

At the war’s end, the United States won territory later divided and known as New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California. Land acquisition became more central to the United States’ interests. From Virginia to the Thirteen Colonies of the Northeast to the Ohio Valley, Florida and Louisiana, the United States was in the territory acquisition

¹⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2015), 4, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹¹ Julian Samora and Patricia Vandel Simon, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, rev. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 94.

¹² Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 177, ProQuest Ebook Central.

business—not simply to have and hold land but to enculturate, displace its native inhabitants, or live in peace among other Whites. As the White non-slave-holding settlers found themselves in a new frontier land, the object fueling their flight would turn out to be less disposable than they hoped. In fact, “White flight to the northwest with the idea of homogenous living among whites-only communities was impossible as slave holders sought the same land opportunities as poor whites and brought their slaves as land required free labor.”¹³

The war with Mexico was about more than land but about garnering political power as slaveholders in states favorable to slaveholding could count each slave as three-fifths a person. Abolitionist power from the Northeast mounted against slave states, so it was important for Texas, a slave state, to enter and help slave states retain power in the national legislature.¹⁴ In addition, fighting with Mexico would bring Americans closer to their Manifest Destiny as many hoped to annex Mexico because the priority of Manifest Destiny was to settle, develop, and dominate the entire continent.

The Treaty of Guadalupe was designed to bring a peaceful close to the conflict between Mexico and the U.S. It included generous protections for Mexico, particularly against any European war power. There was domestic significance to the Treaty. The Treaty afforded Mexicans who elected to remain on American soil the rights to their property and traditional practices. However, such rights were short-lived. In the spirit of Manifest Destiny, White Americans violated the Treaty and confiscated the former Mexicans’ property, denied them the right to practice their faith, and introduced English

¹³ Samora and Simon, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, 90.

¹⁴ Samora and Simon, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, 100.

as the official language of the territory.¹⁵ There was a common belief among White settlers that the Mexican was a “lazy, uncivilized person, reduced to a state of inferiority by his language, his religion, and his culture.”¹⁶ Therefore, Mexicans were stripped of Guadalupe protections. Though Mexicans could worship how and where they pleased, “they were often ridiculed for doing so. And, in some areas, aggressive Anglos made it difficult for them to get to church or worked to drive the Catholic priest out of town.”¹⁷

As new territories were being added to the U.S., the discovery of gold further increased the sense of destiny among people in the expanded West. Turner captures the insolent posture of the frontiersmen concerning the Sierra Nevada. He writes, “On his border, and checking his advance, were the Indian, the Spaniard, and the Englishman. He was indignant at Eastern indifference and lack of sympathy with his view of his relations to these peoples; at the short-sightedness of Eastern policy.”¹⁸ The politics of America failed to always identify with its expansionist quests. The idealism on the western frontier failed to reverberate to the halls of the Capitol though the conquest of territory was economically and politically valuable to the realization of the nation’s vision for Manifest Destiny.

¹⁵ Samora and Simon, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, 100.

¹⁶ Samora and Simon, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, 100.

¹⁷ Samora and Simon, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, 100.

¹⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2015), 136, ProQuest Ebook Central.

The Mid-Century Quest For Gold

In 1848, the secret that Sacramento pioneer John Sutter discovered gold unleashed a bombardment of prospectors to the California region. People in a desperate hunt for the shiny fortune made destiny more real than ideal. Since no easy ways nor easy methods to travel to California existed, frontiersmen braved a deathly journey through treacherous territory laced with enemies both human and geographical. Sutter's discovery sent out a strong scent of wealth and people rushed from every direction to pan for gold.

Early on, gold could be found in remote areas, sometimes simply laying visibly within the soil. However, mining became necessary. In the drive for miners to economically thrive, American Indians on the frontier tirelessly wrestled with invading forces to survive. Miners moved aggressively into American Indian territory. Native Americans not only fought to protect their lives but also to preserve their lifestyles. American Indians were systematically displaced from their homelands.

Freedom for the American Indian required passive aggressiveness. They were both victim and perpetrator. In *Exterminate Them: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of American Indians During the California Gold Rush*, authors Clifford Trafzer and Joel Hyer label American Indians who were victims of miners "adroit raiders."¹⁹ Trafzer and Hyer add, "They successfully seized horses, livestock, and supplies from miners, ranchers, and immigrants in order to survive. With the depletion of traditional game, Indians had no other alternative but to steal from non-Indians."²⁰ The

¹⁹ Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer, eds., "Native American Reaction to the Invasion," in *Exterminate Them: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of American Indians during the California Gold Rush* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt7zt6m8.7>.

²⁰ Trafzer and Hyer, "Native American Reaction to the Invasion," 55-56.

tensions between American Indians and miners were not only evident in geographical and political acquisition and displacement of people, but the literature of its time romanticized the tensions. Writing was responsible for the intellectual encoding of the idea of manifest destiny. Brian Roberts writes that:

This literary context for the gold rush, while often ignored or simply denied, is every bit as important as the political, social, and geographical contexts of manifest destiny, the West, or California. For the market revolution was also a print revolution, and a mass increase in reading and writing would frame the gold rush as much as economic necessity or a spirit of western expansion. Indeed, one of the elements that makes the California gold rush stand out.²¹

The essence of Manifest Destiny was well propagated through literature, and it contrived to communicate a lopsided narrative of marauders attempting to preserve a life and environment of savagery by harassing people who chased a vision. Art took on the mission of depicting White and American Indian confrontations. Baigell writes that “Captivity images such as *Osage Scalp Dance* by John Mix Stanley (1814-1872) introduced the notion of American Indian molestation of white women, an issue still more inflammatory than same-race molestation in America.”²² American realism painter Frederic Remington, through images of aggression and captivity, depicts American Indians unduly halting the spirit of the White progressive frontiersman. Thus, the idea of Manifest Destiny began to transcend the battlefield and enter the American home and school. Concurrent with the California Gold Rush, California became a state and thus reinforced the probability for a strong continental amalgamation, especially with the West.

²¹ Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 52, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²² Matthew Baigell, “Territory, Race, Religion: Images of Manifest Destiny,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, nos. 3-4 (1990): 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109013>.

With the Mexican War being history, it would have seemed likely that the U.S. realized continental unity. However, there was the problem of slavery and the economy to which slavery was inextricably connected. On the cusp of the American Civil War, the destiny of the nation was about to face a question wherein its own values of freedom and liberty are at the core. Morrison states that the question is “In short, were the institutions of the West, and for that matter future acquisitions, to resemble those of the North or South?”²³ Was slavery to be a mainstay of the West and would it be the fundamental driver of the economy?

In the winter of 1861, shortly after President Lincoln’s inauguration as the sixteenth President of the United States, southern loyalists to slavery commenced an attack in Sumpter, South Carolina. Soon, some other slaveholding states joined what was to be the Confederacy. Together, the Confederate Army sought an arduous battle against the Union—states that were mostly against slavery. By the time Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to the Union Army at the Appomattox Courthouse in 1865, most of the South was ravaged and left as the smoldered dream of American economic success and freedom at the expense of slaves. An impression of authentic freedom that could not be realized through systematic bondage of an “other” eclipsed the South’s portion of manifest destiny.

The Civil War and Displacement

Much of the Civil War was fought in the South. Yet, the Civil War also affected other North American regions and their people. During the middle of the War, a well-

²³ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 6.

known General Thomas Ewing, Jr. led the mission to remove populations from the Missouri border. In 1863, he issued General Order Eleven that gave a swift timeline for the depopulation of the Missouri-Kansas border leading to the displacement of many American Indians and Whites. The eviction of these Missouri border populations was reminiscent of the many prior people displacements. Diane Mutti Burke writes that:

The long history of violence and displacement in the Kansas-Missouri borderlands began with the eviction of American Indians. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, the Osage dominated southwestern Missouri through their alliance with French fur interests out of St. Louis. In addition, a number of emigrant American Indian tribes, the Delaware, Shawnee, and Potawatomi, among others, had recently relocated to Missouri from the eastern states. When U.S. settlers flooded into the region, the federal government attempted to confine the American Indians to western Missouri in order to make way for the newcomers in the eastern and central parts of the territory. The Osage were forced by treaty—with little compensation—onto a small section of land near the Marais des Cygnes River in southwestern Missouri, and the Iowa, Potawatomi, and Sac and Fox were relegated to a section of land in northwestern Missouri. When white settlers clamored for more land, the U.S. government forced the Osage out of the state in 1825 and acquired the land of those in northwestern Missouri through the “Platte Purchase” in 1836. By the 1840s, the government had virtually completed the “ethnic cleansing of Missouri,” making way for the increasing number of migrants, most hailing from the Upper South and many bringing their slaves.²⁴

The long-term establishment of displacement practices perhaps secured the General in his brazen effort to displace the White people along with the “others.” However, Ewing lost his post and popularity because of his domination on White settlers. Before the War’s end, Union Army colonel and Methodist minister John Chivington, dubbed “The Fighting Parson,” led 1,000 soldiers against a passive and assuming population of Cheyenne Indians on Sand Creek, Colorado Territory. Over 200 mostly women and children were massacred leaving bodies reflecting scalping and genital mutilation. Some body parts

²⁴ Diane Mutti Burke, “Scattered People: The Long History of Forced Eviction in the Kansas–Missouri Borderlands,” in *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States*, eds Arenson Adam and Andrew R. Graybill (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt13x1gqn.8>.

were taken to display in the neighboring towns. The massacre led to the 1865 Treaty of the Little Arkansas where the Cheyenne Indians surrendered their old reservation for less desirable lands elsewhere.²⁵ Such events are examples of the contempt for American Indians and their right to live peacefully in community.

While manifest destiny can be painfully aggressive virulently forging itself against cohabitation with non-White groups in “undiscovered” territories, it can also passively insert itself into the landscape of the affairs of a heterogenous migration of people in hopes to find a space hospitable to all Americans and friendly to their “differences.” The outcome of the Civil War was the freeing of slaves. Sadly, but sometimes by perceived necessity, some ex-slaves continued to stay on the plantation. Due to the harsh treatment, violence, and discrimination, others who tried to remain in the South found it lifesaving to relocate to the North. The Industrial Era was alive, relieving African Americans of even the most menial jobs. Europeans rapidly entered the job market in the U.S. and sharecropping and industrial machinery for manufacturing and farming replaced slave labor. These factors contributed to the wave of African Americans leaving the South for a more sanguine future. They headed north but found that discrimination and racist temperament was also a reality there. Northern cities offered slum lords and exploitation of laborers as Blacks were paid lower wages, worked longer hours, and were used as pawns against White labor unions demanding fair wages for its White workers.²⁶

²⁵ James T. King, s.v. “Cheyenne-Arapaho War (1864–65),” *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, ed. Howard R. Lamar (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 1, https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/americanwest/cheyenne_arapaho_war_1864_65/0?institutionId=8909.

Political Thought and Black Migrant Assimilation

Rumors of a better life rode in from the Midwest and settled on the hot air of the South. There was talk of a land that would make Blacks consumers of the cotton they once picked. Between 1877 and 1879, about 300 Blacks led by Benjamin “Pap” Singleton left their tenant farms in the South and headed in the direction of Kansas. Many of these 300 left the South without money. However soon after, approximately 20,000 African Americans made the journey. This wave of migrants had more resources and were more prepared to settle and begin a better life.²⁷ This group is known as the “Exodusters.” Singleton, after moving to Tennessee and setting up a real estate company to help African Americans find and settle on property, returned to Kansas with 2,300 people and established Dunlap, Kansas.²⁸ Opposition to Black settlement was so serious that it compelled Singleton to go before the U.S. Congress to present a case for aid for Black settlers in Kansas.

Whites in Kansas were vocally against slavery and radically and politically insistent on the value of Black life.²⁹ Despite Kansas being an anti-slavery state, many Whites hesitated welcoming large numbers of Blacks to their towns and neighborhoods. Though the second wave of migrants were not poor, they were Black, and Whites refused

²⁶ Leila Sadeghi, s.v. “Great Migration,” *Encyclopedia of Race and Crime*, ed. Helen Taylor Greene and Shaun L. Gabbidon (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 323-324, <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781412971928.n130>.

²⁷ Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1978), 79, doi:10.1353/book.81265.

²⁸ Stewart R. King, s.v. “Exoduster Movement,” *Encyclopedia of Free Blacks and People of Color in the Americas* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2012), 1, https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/foffree/exoduster_movement/0?institutionId=8909.

²⁹ Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 70-71.

to sell property to them.³⁰ White farmers refused to hire them because they did not want to live with them as had been the case in the South. In his book, *In Search for Canaan*, author Robert G. Athearn tells a story of the covertness of racial prejudice in an anti-slavery state. He writes that:

The Fort Scott attorney might have mentioned a recent event in his city to further document the feeling of that city. A Negro, charged with assaulting a twelve-year-old girl, was taken from the local jail in March of 1879, and escorted by thirty masked men supported by a mob, he was hung to a lamp post. Then, to celebrate the act, a fire made from dry goods boxes was kindled in the street, and the body was incinerated.³¹

The aim of neoliberal political thought was to object to slavery in the south; but it was not oriented toward absorbing former slaves into its personal environment to share in its community's life. More grave was the action of the antislavery community when they committed such an egregious act upon the reputation of the antislavery state as to set a Black man on fire, preempting his legal right to justice. Such an act indicts and incorporates antislavery liberalism into the practice of the sin for which their advocates made speeches and publicly rejected—a phenomenon not seen in the South. Clearly, a Black family, even after the Civil War, was not welcomed to live in a way that would incorporate them into White society. Southern history was quite vocal and overt about how it viewed Blacks and their connection with Whites. So that when 20,000 leave the South, leaving the racial prejudice, near memory of slavery, present conditions of Jim Crow, lynching, rape of Black women, and countless other expressions of injustice and head for Kansas, they expect a new life.

³⁰ King, s.v. "Exoduster Movement," 1.

³¹ Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 71.

Even with their fears of living in community with Blacks (especially indigents), Whites in Kansas lived somewhat peaceably with Blacks. In principle and overall, the residents of Kansas failed to object to the arrival of Blacks as long as the numbers of Blacks arriving was manageable and their communities could absorb them. However, the proprietors of that great sanctuary became uneasy when they suspected that it was used as a dumping ground for the Black dissidents of the South.³² Ironically, Kansas was later the birthing place for the 1954 landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education*. But this twentieth century breakthrough came not without decades of racially prejudiced decisions by the Supreme Court.

The U.S. Supreme Court Hears *Elk v. Wilkins*

In the 1884 case *Elk v. Wilkins*, the U.S. Supreme Court found that American Indians are not U.S. Citizens and were not to be afforded the right to vote in public elections. Justice Gray further maintained that the Fourteenth Amendment requires for citizenship that a person be born in the United States and be subject to the jurisdiction thereof. Since Indians had tribal citizen relationships, they would have to be naturalized to enjoy the citizen's right to vote. *Elk* was not a naturalized citizen.

Three years following *Elk v. Wilkins*, the General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, gave permission for the Executive Branch of the U.S. government to divide and parcel land and execute the distribution of it on a scaled basis. The logic revolved around the fact that the government no longer wished to be “governor” and lord of American Indian affairs. Instead, it sought to dissolve American Indian communities.

³² Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 79.

One source note that “Very sincere individuals reasoned that if a person adopted white clothing and ways, and was responsible for his own farm, he would gradually drop his Indian-ness and be assimilated into the population.”³³ For the American Indian, the land was a spiritual nexus between physical and spiritual. There was a psychological construct that connected land and person and created a structural bond of community. *Property in Land and Other Resources* notes that “The goal of these structures was to promote cooperative behavior. Hence, the intentional result was the creation of shared moral entitlement and a value of the land that was greater than the economic sum of its parts.”³⁴ Not until 1834 did the Indian Reorganization Act halt land allotment practices. Also, the Act “restored tribal ownership in common of the remaining surplus lands.”³⁵

The perpetuation of dividing the physical from their spiritual selves extended to the Dakota Indians of Minnesota. In *Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches*, Angela Wilson describes the dehumanizing treatment of the Dakota people who were, as she describes, separated from their land in two stages.³⁶ In the first stage, they were moved to concentration camps. In the second stage they underwent physical removal from the land and were sent up the Mississippi, disconnecting them from any connection they had with their land. The theological chapter will deconstruct the psychological and spiritual underpinnings of separating the other from land coopted by European greed and

³³ OurDocuments.gov, “Dawes Act (1887),” OurDocuments.gov, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=50>.

³⁴ Daniel H. Cole and Elinor Ostrom, eds., *Property in Land and Other Resources* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2011), 307, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁵ Cole and Ostrom, *Property in Land and Other Resources*, 308.

³⁶ Susan A. Miller and Riding James, eds., *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2011), 5.

entitlement. It will also offer explanation to the psychosocial need of colonialists to be homogenous and appear superior.

Conclusion

Throughout history, movements incidentally or intently displaced populations of people. Whether for the sake of urbanization or land use and development, there seems to be a bias historically connected to the way people interpret each other's right to "place." The colonization of America and the doctrines and ideologies that supported it developed into a system that spread from east to west. Spanning over 2,968 miles from Jamestown, Virginia to San Francisco, California, an ideology of Manifest Destiny challenged the peace of native peoples, upheld the institution of slavery, and displaced whole communities of people. One cannot deny the economic value of such horrific practices born of this ideology. However, on the backs of slaves, American Indians, and the poor, Manifest Destiny is designed. The theft and hoarding of land and the injustice related to land rights expanded American territory and padded the pockets of White America. No less effective in expansion were the practices of displacement, extermination, and enculturation.

White flight is not a contemporary convention; it is not simply running away, but it is also historically tied to the plight of Whites to continually engage themselves with the frontier—the cutting edge to conquer—according to their Manifest Destiny. Expansion is key to a culture's vitality. Along with the swell of adventurism, White culture carried the spirit of superiority, perhaps part and parcel to Manifest Destiny ideology. The ideology promotes the claim that Whites forever long to be in the

newness—the frontier—and whoever or whatever they find there is subject to displacement.

The intended project will address such a sentiment by examining how Manifest Destiny remains the undercurrent of displacement that caused harm to contemporary communities. This project proposes to create a framework through which community development corporations along with churches can address Manifest Destiny—an ideology that thrives in the practices of urbanization—and safeguard against dissolution of community culture and unfair housing practices that led to gentrification as a social force. Physical diaspora is not the indication of dissolution of community; gentrification has the power to displace people while they are in the same geographic location. Persons can live in the city since birth and at adulthood find themselves having to move into substandard housing in the same city. Modern gentrification shares characteristics of historical people displacement and extinction though often such characteristics are sublimely hidden—most radically under programs to aid indigent peoples. In this case indigent means persons who remained in a physical community because of strong family or cultural ties. Even after White flight, these indigents are indigenous to a gentrified area.

While it would be bigoted to want to bar other races from a region to maintain a racially homogenous community, it is imperative that communities have awareness of their cultural and real property values and are equipped to address policies that are ambivalent to the culture that negatively impacts their residents. Boston, New Orleans, Austin, and Washington, D.C. all tasted gentrification and, depending on with whom one speaks, it can be bitter, sweet, or bittersweet.

A sobering example of the bitter effects of gentrification and displacement took place in San Francisco. During World War II, Blacks settled in San Francisco near the shipyard in search of shipbuilding jobs. They built a strong social and residential community that in ways mirrored Harlem. Once the War ended, the community of Fillmore was riddled with crime, a lack of economic investment, and substandard housing projects. In *Conversations with James Baldwin*, the writers state that “San Francisco is engaging...most cities are engaged in...something called urban renewal, which means moving Negroes out. It means Negro removal, that’s what it means. The Federal Government is accomplice to this fact.”³⁷ While Blacks remain in San Francisco, “Urban Renewal in Black San Francisco” authors Christina Jackson and Nicki Jones write that Black urban San Franciscans “have no real place -- no roots -- in the city. They remain a social problem that has been and can still be displaced.”³⁸ Even if new strategies for urban renewal and neighborhood revitalization emerge, it must do so with the keen consciousness that provides space for all people to thrive in community; in a culture authentically their own and not merely be subjects of a perceived divine destiny.

³⁷ Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt, eds., *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 42.

³⁸ Christina Jackson and Nikki Jones, “Remember the Fillmore: The Lingering History of Urban Renewal in Black San Francisco,” in *Black California Dreamin’: The Crisis of California’s African-American Communities*, ed. Ingrid Banks et al. (Santa Barbara, CA: UCSB Center for Black Studies Research, 2012), 68, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/63g6128j>.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: Post Colonial Theology

The theological chapter defines and examines Postcolonial Theology and discuss its relevance, synergy, and synthesis to the biblical and historical chapters around the Numbers chapter thirteen spy story and Manifest Destiny. It also weighs and justifies the spy story under the light of postcolonial and practical theologies while providing support for a project concerning the churches role in civic engagement around the practice of gentrification. This chapter utilizes scripture and theology to critique colonization. Through a look at privilege and its propensity to enact injustice on populations, the chapter examines the notion of privilege as a biblical and historical social construct. It then applies a postcolonial and practical theological critique to render and reveal a theoretical foundation for a project concerning civic engagement.

Also, the chapter connects Practical Theology with the duties and responsibility of the church to engage in civic conversations, particularly where injustice is at play. While this chapter is not negatively critical of the time and place application of the reconnaissance and movement of Israel into Canaan, it suggests Israel's possible lack of understanding of the intent of God. This suggestion becomes increasingly crystalized under a deconstructive examination. Primarily, it is believed that while Numbers chapter thirteen has a particular connotation about covenantal grace, there are spaces for

interpretation that are possible through application of postcolonial insight. Through Postcolonial Theology, there is an analysis of the intent of the covenant and its intended manifestation. Also, Postcolonial Theology would create a space for nontraditional consideration of Moses' interpretation of God's intent.

Later, the chapter examines the binary simplification of the outsider and "otherness" as dehumanizing stigmas to legitimize cultural and economic domination. The chapter creates a nexus between Manifest Destiny—a theme of the historical chapter—and a postcolonial understanding of its use to marginalize people groups. Both Manifest Destiny and its outgrowth—Westward Expansion—mirror and replicate the Numbers chapter thirteen ideology of divine privilege and correlate with the European appetite for power and domination. The application of Postcolonial Theology to the spy story would expose the interplay between Numbers chapter thirteen and Manifest Destiny while deconstructing the perception and indulgence of the kind of privilege that would justify the subjection or even erasure of others. The theological chapter collaborates with the historical chapter to provide a postcolonial consideration of how the biblical text accommodates oppressive movements of early settlers in westward advancing America and the contemporary social application of gentrification.

This chapter attempts not to render an indictment against gentrification as in its strict definition benefits both gentry and inhabitants of an area. Instead, this chapter presents the adverse effects of gentrification's tenets and practice as impetus for the church to become involved in civic spaces that negotiate gentrifying plans and practices. Certainly, in principle gentrification strayed far from its noble intent to improve an area through added resources and opportunities. Rather, it served the purposes of outsiders or

“gentry” and allowed their entry into spaces for the purpose of accommodating their cultural and economic tastes. The chapter also presents the harm that only a singular-eyed or traditional reading of scripture can present for a community. Such readings can be misused to hide the harmful aspects of unjust gentrification or any social system that in its purest form would lead to community revitalization and improvement. While this chapter acknowledges the traditional, biblical theological reading of Numbers chapter thirteen as God’s promise to Israel to restore them to their land, it primarily follows a path of expository argument to remit a conclusion regarding the grave consequences of its misuse as an underpinning for unjust land acquisition and displacement.

Postcolonial Theology would suggest that the chapter is worthy of alternative reading that would embrace the perspective of the Canaanites who inhabit the land. Possibly, two readers could read the same text yet walk away with alternative textual realities. An alternative reading of the text can reveal injustice propelled by fear, lack of faith, and shortsightedness. Also, alternative reading can suggest a narrative around a people who invade a place not historically theirs without giving thought to the people who inhabit it. Alternative readings will illuminate difficulties with the text. Thus, if reading this text in a contemporary application, it would be horrific. Such a text has the propensity to be abused to justify violence. The biblical chapter connects the way this text can serve the need of groups of people to gentrify and violate the sacred space of others and the ill-begotten privilege of that justifies displacement. Both the traditional and alternative reading inform the Doctor of Ministry project related to gentrification. The traditional reading relates to the faithful promises of God to provide for shelter and would thus correlate with the church’s advocacy for sacred space and housing equality.

The alternative reading proposes a prescriptive campaign against gentrification—a practice that strips persons from the neighborhoods in which they lived and thrived for generations.

Postcolonial Thought

As a recent theological discipline, Postcolonial Theology unpacks European colonialism and exposes its difficulties. Postcolonialism is committed to the deconstruction of controlled conversations and perceptions that opens the Bible to dialogue that is both time sensitive and culturally correlative. It reimagines the Bible as presented and passed down through centuries of European ownership and influence and deconstructs it to become a shared understanding of scripture. The task of postcolonial reading involves “challenging the historical-critical method presumed by many to be objective and neutral”¹ Postcolonial strategies examine contextual bias but not without presenting a historical-contextual background that is typically framed by a colonialist interpretation. It also formidably positions theology as an “experienced history of colonial rule.”² Thus, Postcolonial Theology interprets so-called foundational truths rooted in imperialistic values and critiques them within the contextual reality of the human experience. Postcolonial Theology is a lens that focuses on strategies of colonialism and its cultural patterns that lead to dominance and unjust governmental policy and praxis.

¹ Pui-lan Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, The Bible and Liberation (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 13.

² Pramod K. Nayar, ed., *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2015), 153, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=4038632>.

Colonists engaged in building contrastive culture evident in prescribed language patterns that created a binary social order in which there is a “superior” and “inferior” correlative of an “us” and “them” paradigm. Colonialism uses dichotomous language to disenfranchise oppressed people by contrasting them with a social or moral standard. R. S. Sugirtharajah explains that “Colonialists often discursively constructed contrastive paradigms such as Christian/savage, civilized/barbaric and orderly/disorderly in order to define themselves, and also to explain the dominance and acceleration of colonial rule.”³ Early evangelists used these binary trappings for both oppression and suppression of voice to create a religious system that not only approves of dominance but codifies privilege.

To purify by separation of the inferior and the inferior, oppressors engage in physical displacement and all vestiges of the power of the evicted to be erased from the land and the historical account of their cultural existence. In *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, author Miroslav Volf analyzes the social practice of exclusion as a method of cleansing that creates purity. He explains a misdirected theology for a homogeneous society, “The goal must be pure: we must let the light of reason shine into every dark corner create a world of total virtue so as to render all moral effort unnecessary. The origin and the goal, the inside and the outside, everything must be pure: plurality must give way to homogeneity and unity.”⁴

³ R. S. Sugirtharajah, “White Men Bearing Gifts: Diffusion of the Bible and Scriptural Imperialism,” in *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511612619.00363.

⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace, Revised and Updated: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 69. ProQuest Ebook Central.

As colonizers strived to have proprietorship of the truth, postcolonialism notes the unscrupulous practice of colonizers to have proprietorship of language and dialogue, particularly dialogue questioning and defining truth. Pui-Lan notes that “biblical understanding has been pre-packaged and shipped all over the world. The basic problem of the so-called universal gospel is not only does it claim to provide the answer, but it defines the question too!”⁵ Oppressive language and thought managed the complete dialogue. The implication of colonialist control of dialogue is that it seeks to mute the inquisitive language of oppressed populations and creates a substitutionary conversation thereby creating the distorted perception of cooperative dialectic and the dominant’s constituency of the oppressed for the sake of national progress.

Decolonizing Dialectics

Postcolonial Theology partners with other theologies to form diverse perspective. For instance, the dialogue between postmodernism and postcolonialism was complementary and built a bridge between the postmodern subjective and cynical positions on the traditional, colonialist narrative and the post-colonial assessment of the utilization of postmodern conclusions. Postcolonial Theology co-opts the intellectual insights of postmodernism. Ralph McLaren explains the collaborative value of postmodern and postcolonial theologies as they engage in discourse when he writes this:

While the postmodern conversation focused on important intellectual issues like the objectivity and absoluteness of statements, the interpretation of texts, the limitations and biases of language, and so on, the post-colonial conversation focused on how those intellectual issues were playing out in history, especially during and since the era of the Conquistadors. The former was largely about knowledge, and the latter largely about how knowledge became a tool of power.

⁵ Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 11.

So the two conversations were inter-related, and the latter in some ways enfolded and extended the former from the realm of theory to the realm of practice, from philosophy to ethics.⁶

Postcolonialism not only engages other theological genres but stretches across cultural borders and applies itself to the challenge and eradication of oppressive systems. Asian anti-imperialistic theological movements were characterized as postcolonial.⁷

Postcolonial Theology fails to totally surrender the text, but it creates an imaginative platform that promotes dialogue beyond the text and contemplates the unjust, unproductive, and unrealistic use of the text. It also fails to merely critique the appropriation of the historical context in theological history. Its grander enterprise is to analyze a schema of cause and effect that essentially isolates effect as a standard and state of existence. Isolation of effect creates the “other” that fails to fit into the economy of the standard and is not privileged to the estate of the culturally normative. Postcolonial Theology challenges the subterfuge of colonialism that not only alienates but abates the existence and concreteness of the “other” while creating a binary of superior and inferior or actual and perceived. It argues this theology of exclusion and privilege is in distinct opposition with God’s desires for all people to flourish with God being “no respecter of person” (Rom. 2:11). Postcolonial Theology recognizes where deeply embedded doctrines can result in domination and oppressive systems wrapped in narratives of so-called divine judgment.

⁶ Ralph McLaren, “Post-Colonial Theology,” Sojourners, September 15, 2010, <https://sojo.net/articles/post-colonial-theology>.

⁷ Simon Shui-Man Kwan, *Postcolonial Resistance and Asian Theology* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 9, <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315882192>.

A subsidiary of the cultural normative is the dominant's agency in the transformation of the "other" into the standard. Upward transformation of the oppressed is considered an anomaly. Further, the politic that promotes a cultural standard proclaims God as its sponsor and motivator while in inarguable offense presenting it as theology. Therefore, Postcolonial Theology confronts conceptualizing the "other" through design of identity. Hill writes that:

Postcolonialism particularly helps to advance theologies of resistance and a prophetic consciousness by focusing on the nature of identity. Whereas the exclusionary, fragmenting, and polarizing character of the Western, colonial, binary linguistic system encouraged exclusive and oppressive practices, postcolonial theory illuminates the discursive space between "either/or" modes of reasoning. It calls into question the very epistemologies and presuppositions that lead to the categorization and assumed polemics of organizing principles.⁸

Thus, the imperialistic principles embedded in assumptions that attempt to justify oppression pale in the presence of a postcolonial lens that exposes their colonizing social agenda. Reconnaissance, an associated term for the Numbers chapter thirteen mission, was mainly attributed to military science and particularly to the art of war. However, reconnaissance by its holistic definition was long part of practically every segment of society. Various social institutions employ reconnaissance as a strategic tool for activities such as land acquisitions, corporate take-overs and mergers, sales and marketing, as well as institutional growth and development. Its purpose is inextricably linked to understanding the challenges outside its institutional borders for the purpose of lending and benefitting. Moses expresses to Hobab, his brother-in-law, "We are setting out for the

⁸ Johnny Bernard Hill, *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation*. Prophetic Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 36, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=4859218>.

place of which YHWH said, I will give it to you” (Nm. 10:29).⁹ Deuteronomy elaborates on this plan by elaborating on YHWH’s promise, stating “with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant” (Dt. 6:10-11). The promise innocently benefits the Hebrew gentrifiers as they are merely receivers of a promise for which they failed to ask. Yet, in the case of the way they come to the actual receipt and manifestation of the promise is not so clear-cut.

Number chapter thirteen informs the early and formative history of America albeit the interpretation was self-serving and misconstrued. Thus, the focus of the historical chapter is on manifest destiny—the perceived God-given right to possess a property occupied by others. Western expansion, a by-product of manifest destiny, involved the unjust invasion and displacement of large populations of people in the name of economic prosperity. From this frame of thought and the perversion of God’s promise to Abraham and covenant with Moses acts of gentrification are generated. Social justice includes spatial justice and the recognition of the sacredness of space and place. Postcolonial thought not only wrestles privilege, but it confronts insider-ship, constraint of information, dominance, and privilege justified by ancient biblical texts such as Numbers chapter thirteen.

A postcolonial reading deconstructs the Numbers text to see who speaks and how the historical narrative approaches contemporary culture and the basic human condition. In verse one, God instructs Moses to choose, call, and send. Moses subsequently gives

⁹ Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, “Numbers,” in *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*, ed. Hemchand Gossai (London, UK: T and T Clark, 2018), 74, <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.5040/9780567680976.0011>.

more elaborate and detailed instructions to the twelve tribes. The intent of God expands and perhaps fails through Moses' detailed instructions to the spies, and then by the spies' return, witness, and counter instruction for moving forward into Canaan. While on the surface the command seems noble and divine, the fear, intimidation, or reluctance of Israel to live beside Canaan and maintain its cultural values while synergizing with Canaanites to maintain the vitality of the land distorts the command.

Postcolonial Theology examines the formation of such a view under a critical-historical lens. That is, what are the implications of Moses' fusing God's command with his own cultural understanding? Would an oppressive system such as what is found in Egypt have influence over Moses' exclusion of women in the leadership? After all, he was certainly acquainted with women in leadership as his sister was a member of the triad engaged in leading Israel. Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, in her article on Numbers chapter six, asserts that Israel's pursuit of Canaan "is not about the domestic setting but about the contact zone of empire."¹⁰ The Israelites are promised a land that is occupied, and this passage guarantees Israel that even though the land is occupied, the current inhabitants will be aborted, never to repopulate. This is parallel to the history of western expansion in the United States.

Simply, gentrification is the acquisition of run-down unproductive properties for the purpose of increasing their vitality through renovation and renewal. In theory, it is an ideal proposition as whole communities would benefit. The difficulty becomes the greed and cultural indifference that lies at the foundation of gentrifying practices. While a gentrified neighborhood is rundown and decreased in monetary value, it retains its

¹⁰ Mbuwayesango, "Numbers," 72.

historical value and increases in its potential for rehabilitation.¹¹ However, gentrifiers have little or no sensitivity to the culture or needs of the inhabitants. If remnants of culture remain after gentrification, they are subjugated to the overall objective of gentrifiers, which is undoubtedly to raise the value of property or in compliance with a negotiated, government condition for community revitalization. Consequentially, inhabitants and their future generations are priced out of neighborhoods that they historically populated and enculturated. Possibly the most disturbing idea surrounding gentrification is that, like Westward Expansion, gentrifiers are a select people with understanding of the common good and the privilege and assets to carry out programs that distinguish them from the “other.” Further, gentrification and expansionism—its historical counterpart—base their practices on unethical acquisition of properties and displacement of people.

Interestingly, land flowing with milk and honey was not rundown as in typical pre-gentrification venues. Conversely, it was a prosperous land full of growth and prosperity. The gentrifying of Canaan fails to simply involve economic restoration, but it involves cultural renovation and assimilation. This indicates that gentrification is not simply for economic improvement but for cultural renovation and sanitation. A contemplative reading of the text offers Canaan as a prospective candidate for cultural overhaul. As prosperous and strong as the inhabitants were, the Israelites thought that they had the right to attack their way of living. This fact presents a complexity around the invasion of Canaan. Under this condition, Israel could have sanctimoniously committed

¹¹ Mehmet Emin Salgamcioglu and Alper Ünlü, “A Comparative Study of Planned and Spontaneous Gentrification Processes,” *Open House International* 39, no. 4 (December 2014): 28-41, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/comparative-study-planned-spontaneous/docview/1726452585/se-2?accountid=202487>.

collective traumatization of the people of Canaan. Such a conclusion is not to oversimplify the cause for the invasion of Canaan but to lend perspective on the Romans charge to live peaceably with the world (Rom. 12:18).

Moses, their leader, orders the Israelites to move into Canaan. However, an alternative consideration could reveal that they go ahead of God and short-circuit what God essentially wants. Conceivably, God perhaps wants Israel to be a light to Canaan that would provide Canaan the benefit of knowing and having a relationship with God just as the Israelites. Israel was called to be light and to be God's voice among the nations. At a minimum and through a postcolonial lens of the oppressed, God's desire possibly was to show the magnitude of care for all creation through peaceful diversification.

Practical Theology incorporates contemplation of theory and the responsive behavior that lives into ministry. As stark as such a definition may seem, Practical Theology remains a conundrum without a pinpoint and specific meaning. One ideation of Practical Theology is that it is the application of theories and principles in a complex world and the meaning-making "of human beings as they live out their lives amidst the complexities and uncertainties of an unpredictable world."¹² Therefore, Practical Theology is not simply the doing and outpouring of Christian faith, but it is the being of Christ in the world. Calahan confers upon praxis the designation of habitus, a construct of knowing, perceiving, living, and valuing the voice of community. Calahan claims that Practical Theology "takes the risk of listening to the critical concerns and practical realities of Christians living in particular contexts, and it must offer constructive

¹² David Willows and John Swinton, eds., *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context* (London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 19, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3015871>.

theological proposals for living faithfully in that context.”¹³ Practical Theology is not applied Systematic or Biblical Theology.

Inclusion of Practical Theology within the Postcolonial Theology conversation activates precepts of postcolonialism. Such intertwining of theory and practical avoids the abandonment of either being its own source of proofs. Thus, the critique of the Numbers chapter thirteen through a postcolonial lens proposes insights on gender equality but becomes feeble without attention to praxis. Practical Theology and the ministry that evolves from it give voice to theory. In ways, it is the response to theory and theology in motion. To simply become boots on the ground may be inadequate for creating a liberative church in a Christian tradition that is unwilling to deconstruct imperialist values. Practical Theology may be limited by its sole reliance on other theologies to order its activity. With a groundswell of social concerns not acknowledged by mainstream Christian theology, Practical Theology may be charged to quiet the delusions manufactured by the colonized interpretation of biblical text. For example, Practical Theology is not only the method for active engagement in community, but it takes on a passive role receiving response and feedback from community. Ideally, the feedback provokes assessment of theology and practice and—when necessary—adjusts in thought and praxis. In this regard, Practical Theology mediates a community’s reception of Christian thought.

¹³ Kathleen A. Cahalan, “Three Approaches to Practical Theology, Theological Education, and the Church’s Ministry,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 1 (2005): 93, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJPT.2005.005>.

Considering the Barthian Model of Practical Theology, Don Browning lends a perspective regarding Practical Theology as “practical in more complicated ways.”¹⁴ Browning relates a definition of Practical Theology that is much more far-reaching than Practical Theology being the application arm of theology. Brown expresses that “The theologian does not stand before God, scripture, and the historic witness of the church like an empty slate or Lockean *tabula rasa* ready to be determined, filled up, and then plugged into a concrete practical situation.”¹⁵ Instead, practical theological thought is gained from engagement. He argues that praxis dominates theology to the point that the church fails to notice the presence of theory embedded in praxis.¹⁶

Browning’s assessment works with a theological interpretation of Numbers chapter thirteen to benefit colonization and subjugation in America. The practice was missing the theological understanding of sacredness of space, justice, and dignity. While Practical Theology is new concept, it has nonetheless been a method of the church throughout history. It seems too simple to reveal the full force and the complexity of Israel’s appearance in Canaan. However, when applied, Postcolonial Theology digs deep into nuances of the historical context and how these nuances migrate into current practices. Perceivably, the invasion of Canaan and Westward Expansion were co-opted as a missionary impetus for bringing religious, social, and doctrinal values to savages living aimlessly and unproductively. Westward Expansion was oxymoronic in relation to Canaan as the people and their economy were strong as evidenced by the report to Moses.

¹⁴ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 5, <https://hdl-handle-net.dtl.idm.oclc.org/2027/heb.30684>, EPUB.

¹⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 6.

¹⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 6.

The indigenous peoples of North America were self-sustaining and productive. The invalid perception, however, was that these inhabitants failed to fully appreciate the land.

The approach of Postcolonial Theology views religion as “capable of interrogation by new forms of academic enquiry.”¹⁷ In part, the formation of a colonial socio-political world, particularly in the case of early American settlement, stemmed from the manipulation of scripture for the purpose of gaining power to advance the self-interest of White male dominated European culture. In *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies*, author Vitor Westhelle describes the nature of colonialism as being more than a practice of a body of zealous fifteenth century conquistadors who set out for the Americas on a quest for gold. Los Casas perpetuates an assessment of greed in which he perceives the actions of conquistadors as a “character flaw.”¹⁸ Westhelle contends that colonialization is a social project initiated through the actions of conquistadors. He further states that “The conquest of the Americas is the pretext of the colonial inscription of the world under the parameters of Western hegemony.”¹⁹

The appetite of the Europeans for power was systemized by design to incorporate land expansion and cultural domination in the name of the Lord. Christendom, a term related to religious dominance, is parallel to the Constantinian edict that “as the Acts of

¹⁷ Jenny Daggers, “Thinking ‘Religion’ and ‘the Religions’ in European Modernity,” in *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 1, eBook.

¹⁸ Vitor Westhelle, *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 5, *EBSCOhost*, search-ebSCOhost-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true and db=nlebk and AN=833293 and site=ehost-live and scope=site.

¹⁹ Westhelle, *After Heresy*, 2.

the Apostles described the early church—was co-opted to support power and privilege.”²⁰

Narrowing the lens to postcolonialism to capture the view of Postcolonial Theology renders a picture of America—a nation that wrapped itself in a membrane—protective of its self-endowed privilege. European privilege in America emerges from conceptual fantasy and becomes practical reality.

Postcolonial reading is an alternative perspective that criticizes power dynamics and renders criticism of voice to colonized conditions and ideas such as orientalism and otherness that dehumanizes populations. Expansionism, imperialism, and nationalism are movements that hinge on the theories akin to colonialism. Postcolonial theological inquiry liberates the voice of the oppressed and draws attention to those whose voices were lost in narrative but were relevant in meaning and theme. For example, the absent voices of Israelite women and of indigenous Canaanites living productively raise concern in a postcolonial dialogue. Not only is the voice of leadership absent from the wilderness narrative, but the woman endures punitive consequences of questioning authority. Miriam questioned Moses’ choice for a wife and unlike Aaron, her male counterpart and contributor in the critique of Moses, she was punished with leprosy. It was only when the male voice of Moses spoke to God in defense of Miriam that she was relieved of the disease and the agony of being ejected from community. A traditional reading of this Miriam vs. Moses and his Cushite wife narrative yields the notion that Miriam disapproved of Moses’ mixed marriage, particularly to a dark-skinned Cushite. However, an interesting argument is that marriage to the Cushite woman inflated Moses’ stature.

²⁰ Tim Hartman, *Theology After Colonization: Kwame Bediako, Karl Barth, and the Future of Theological Reflection*, Notre Dame Studies in African Theology (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), xv.

According to this interpretation, Randall Bailey argues “Miriam’s reference to the Cushite wife is not a racist claim against this woman; rather, it is a disclaimer that association with the Cushites is not the prime way to gain status. The prime way is to be addressed by Yahweh.”²¹ Thus, not only is Miriam a leader castigated for her just opinion of Moses’ status seeking, marriage to the Cushite woman and perhaps the Cushite woman herself become object of Moses’ lack of faith in God. The voice of the woman, then, is only evident through an indirect projection of how her status negatively affects Moses’ relationship with God and family.

Further, post-conquest narrative of Zelophahad’s daughters’ claim to land was disappointingly not a stand for equity in land rights. Instead, it was born out of a need for the preservation of male-benefitting policy to ensure equitable land distribution rights among males. That is, while the five daughters of Zelophahad may have been successful in their case for possession of their deceased father’s rights, they were merely acquiring land for males as they, when married, must relinquish their property rights to their husbands. There is, therefore, muted voice and possession among women in Israel. The practice of silencing voices, inequitable land acquisition, obscuring identity are not only interpreted as “Christian” privilege but is mirrored through oppressive events well into the expansionist efforts of European franchising.

Conceptualizing the Bible as an imperializing and exclusionary force, Postcolonial Theology analyzes biased European-crafted anthropologies that legitimized racial and gender stereotyping and discrimination. Readings that are resistant to traditional models critique the Bible as a product of powers. The Bible alone is incapable

²¹ Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, 13th anniversary exp. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2021), 201.

of colonizing. Powers such as those European colonizers that franchise other geographies and their indigenous population for the enterprise of economic superiority or cultural assimilation co-opt the Bible. In *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology*, author Emmanuel Lartey explains that carrying of God on the back of European interpretation and resultant practices “erases an aspect of the image of God in humanity.”²² It therefore nullifies the importance of a God shared among people and interpreted within the context of their culture. Lartey continues, writing that “This ‘idol’ has taken the place of the God of all creation whose manifold wisdom, infinite majesty and ineffable mystery can only be glimpsed through the collective image of all humanity.”²³ The flawed identification of God and God’s character has detrimental consequences for the ministry praxis.

In a New Testament response to the Old Testament reconnaissance narrative, Jesus’ name is invoked in the plea to liberate a demoniac. In Luke chapter eight, the demons posture themselves as invaders who have trouble containing the demoniac whose rights are compromised but who refuses to be shackled. Jesus, the liberator, mediates the allegory of demon and demoniac. A postcolonial reading encounters the sub-theme or metaphorical meaning under the scope of the national historical and political subjection of Israel to the Roman Empire. The degree of subjection and cultural oppression created a monstrous outcry and uncontainable resistance among the oppressed. Jesus comes to liberate and thus exorcizes the oppressed while driving the oppressor out of the demoniac into the pigs and subsequently into the sea. This picture of the violence of Rome against

²² Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology* (London, UK: Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd, 2013), 124, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²³ Lartey, *Postcolonializing God*, 125.

Israel once more vividly portrays judgment in favor of oppressed peoples, albeit Israel was an Old Testament oppressor. However, it is important to note that Jesus enacts justice on behalf of the oppressed and not necessarily on behalf of a particular nation nor people. This drives a reflection to Numbers chapter thirteen in which a postcolonial understanding would not release Canaan at Numbers 13:33 but would follow the Israelites into Numbers chapter fourteen where Israel receives judgment for lack of faith and inconsistency with following directions. Quite possibly, the consequential position in which they are not only testified of their wickedness but speaks to a punishment for their violation of time and space. Thus, the focus of this New Testament paradigm of justice and liberation centers on release from the act of oppression, subjugation, and domination.

No entity operates in isolation. In its least complex form, it involves an inward spirit and an outward manifestation. Likewise, communities as institutions are entities with a “spirit” that drives their outward materiality. A simplistic view of community may only yield the operative parts and their associated responsibilities and authority. However, a closer interpretation of the function of community would suggest that beneath its tangible factors lies its spirit. Of the spirit of a community its vision and governance are born. The spirit of community enacts policies requisite to the spirit of the community. Therefore, if White male privilege fuels the spirit of a community, its laws and policies will perpetuate injustice for women and create a society that supports the dominance of White males. Acknowledging and understanding the spiritual value of community opens the possibility of Practical Theology that gives a voice to the unengaged “other” that the oppressive crafting of self-serving realities and identification silenced. The traditional identity for Rahab, for example, emits images of women as

subservient even to the male invaders of their spaces and protectors of men. There is little recognition of her business acumen, her standing and influence in a city, her leadership strength, and her ability to prophetically strategize and negotiate.

Traditionally speaking, she is valued only as a complicit agent of the invasion and more specifically viewed as a prostitute turned traitor. Yet, a postcolonial rendering would analyze her complicity with the Joshua chapter six spies and perhaps evaluate her actions according to her authentic identity as a businesswoman. It would also weigh such a narrative in a postmodern context. The traditional interpretation of the text produces a platform in which women are silenced in planning and strategic preparations. In Numbers chapter thirteen, Moses calls on twelve male leaders. Women are absent from the strategic table and the strategic narrative. However, the narrative includes Moses' intervention where he changes Joshua's identity to accommodate his inclusion in the narrative. His people are enemies of Israel. Therefore, it would be reasonable to deduce that the inclusion of the voice of enemies of Israel is preferred more than the voice of the women of Israel.

Voice is imperative in the alleviation of injustices for marginalized people. Religious praxis emphasizes healthy communal imperatives that safeguard all members of a community. Practical Theology is not outside of the purview of postcolonial thought but is the labor component of postcolonial theological values. With Postcolonial Theology acting as deconstructive, Practical Theology serves as constructive. Effective Practical Theology must have a system and approach that is congenial and accommodating of the needs of a heterogeneous and diverse society while liberating people to see God within their own experiences and identities.

Israel's movement into Canaan carries unprecedented opportunities to share space and faith. Rahab's testimony confirms the regions familiarity with the power of YHWH. Foreign to Canaanite's experience perhaps is the lovingkindness and grace of God as experienced by the Israelites who were themselves rescued from oppression. In "Jeong: A Practical Theology of Postcolonial Interfaith Relations," author Sue Kim Park presents a practical model for interaction among interfaith groups. She considers herself "a practical theologian living in a postcolonial space."²⁴ Park discusses the work of Korean American Christians (KACs) with the implication that it is presently insufficient to build strong and potent interfaith relationships that breed and cultivate peace. She casts the "Jesus loves you" claim given to the oppressed as empty when they are entangled in a life of suffering. The practical solutions or the manifestation or showing of love were contained in Jeong, a practice and strategy that serves the purpose of creating peace and solidarity among practitioners of diverse traditions.

Those persons with whom she worked in the practice of Jeong "wanted to see concretely how this love works and what it does to liberate."²⁵ Therefore, they were more concerned with the practicality of love than the theory. Jeong is a practice of mutuality that expresses love among people and not simply to them. Thus, it is practical to conceive that the church that only verbally expresses Jesus' love for community through sermons, teachings, and by-lines scrolling on church marquis is out of touch with the needs of the community. Once there is no practical exhibit of love in community, including the expression of one's authentic identity and equal participation in the management and

²⁴ Sue Kim Park, "Jeong: A Practical Theology of Postcolonial Interfaith Relations," *Religions* 11, no. 10 (2020): 515, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100515>.

²⁵ Park, "Jeong," 515.

direction of the trajectory of their life, culture, and space, the community becomes vulnerable to the entrapment of oppression.

Summary

The main theme and task of Postcolonial Theology is to challenge and critique oppressive systems of power designed to dominate and oppress populations. To do so involves deconstructing context and constructing a voice for the dominated.

Postcolonialism falls short of offering a practical component that moves society toward transformation. Therefore, singularly, Postcolonial Theology is not transformative but lends to the platform of transformation and equitable action. Therefore, it is necessary to pair Postcolonial Theology with Practical Theology so that its truths can manifest, its challenges of colonialism can be practically met, and its questions can be answered.

Many urban and suburban areas are highly vulnerable to gentrification, a product of colonial thought. Within the context served by the doctoral project, many properties were neglected and there was little organized effort to revitalize the properties, offer community services, and provide economic stabilization for the benefit of persons indigenous to the community. Groups from outside the community who expressed to the City Council the need to create an art space while preserving the historical identity of the community caused slight intrusions. Of importance is the fact that preservation of historical identity and heritage is not necessarily the preservation of cultural identity. Also, inquiries about the context fail to include economic opportunities for long-term residents of the community. Therefore, the church will be taught to view the community and possible gentrification efforts through a Postcolonial Theology lens followed by

practical application of basic understanding of the theology. Specifically, theological understanding is the underpinning of praxis. That is, the participants in the project will not blindly participate in community organizing, but it will see the importance of having a voice at civic tables where business related to the welfare of minority and historical inhabitants are negotiated.

Stephen Burns contends that postcolonialism is not only concerned with church doctrine and how Christian theology works within the walls of the church, but it has “a historical sense, concerned with the social, political, and cultural conditions of the current world order, giving special attention to the effects of colonization.”²⁶ This task of postcolonial understanding of contemporary context and world order is stretched to involve sensitivity to religious dynamics and diversity in the interreligious landscape of community. The Christian perception of God intrinsically allows for the freedom of others to believe what they desire and be valued as co-laborers in secular community. Interreligious understanding or at least acknowledgment may circumvent injustices fueled by ideations of “others,” and binary designations as us/them or superior/negative. Of importance is for the Christian at the civic table to not merely be tolerant of other religious values that sit at the same table but to share power. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook argues that “shared leadership and facilitation is ideal in interreligious encounters, as is the need for democratic space and the expectation that learners are actively engaged in their own learning.”²⁷

²⁶ Pui-lan Kwok and Stephen Burns, eds., *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 3, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷ Kwok and Burns, *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry*, 156.

Entering and leading in civic spaces, then requires cultural consciousness and a drive among all at the table to work together without the burden of privilege. The church creating space within its own faculties to speak to injustice against all people, to engage in practices of reconciliation, and to reinvigorate and revitalize community under the universality of love and respect for all is crucial. America suffered the history of Western expansion and all its trappings. Even the church was accused of playing a major part in the oppression of people, displacing them with no regard to sacred space. The twenty-first century church recognizing the harm that historically was committed because of misinterpretation (or even disregard) for the mandate of Christ to love one another and to live peaceably among each other is important. The church has an opportunity to lead in societal redemption by challenging ideas and systems that stem from colonialist ideology. By gaining insight of the types of societal injustice historically committed through gentrification and methods of domination, the context's participant-learners can then carry that understanding to civic tables where they will develop a voice of the love and justice of Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Community organizing is a broad field yielding various methods of collaborative work and leadership, which was viewed as a function of spiritual life.¹ In facilitating community organization, it is necessary to assess and define the strength and weakness of social capital or the assets available for community vitality. Instrumental to any field is the theory that key elements that drive the work of the field. Inherent in community organizing is a complexity that challenges the work of community revitalization. Community values and traditions are among the most prevalent indicators of community and the strict adherence to such values tend to prohibit effective collaboration between developers and residents.

This chapter discusses community revitalization theory through the lens of social capital. The term social capital is diverse in its application in its use to describe a profit-bearing asset across many disciplines. In community revitalization, social capital was considered an asset in the support of cooperative and collaborative change. This chapter builds a case to show collaboration as a key element for successful community organizing for the purpose of community revitalization. Also, this chapter examines

¹ The Project on Lived Theology, “Community Organizing as a Spiritual Discipline – Panel Discussion,” The Project on Lived Theology, <https://www.livedtheology.org/resources/community-organizing-as-a-spiritual-discipline/>.

strategies that help determine key human resources and identify common values in communities. In collaboration with the theological foundations chapter, this chapter develops theory into an outcome-based praxis.

Principal to this chapter is incorporation of just practices, such as consensus-based strategies, which reflect the values of all community stakeholders. This chapter critiques social capital theory for its advantages and disadvantages. Thus, this chapter advocates not for its unconditional use, but points out its biases, advantages, and historical misuse in community revitalization as rationale for its guarded use. For this discussion, this chapter stresses the importance of the engagement of the church as a stakeholder in community revitalization. From a relational approach of shared wisdom, the church is a community stakeholder that comes to community bearing gifts and should thus be considered part of the social capital of any community revitalization effort. The church not only has a voice of mediation around shalom, but it has the capacity to share its institutional wisdom. Many times, churches were local to community and are the repositories of the community's historical narrative that can often serve as cultural capital. While cultural capital is an inherent part of social capital, ultimately economic capital overshadows it as the consummate answer to societal problems.

Though social reformer L Judson Hanifan coined the term in 1916, Pierre Bourdieu is considered the forerunner of social capital theory. He defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”² It appears in diverse forms with each form often complementary of

² Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 22.

another within a group. This chapter discusses the similarity of habitus between people who live in similar environments with similar resources and concerns. While there are various arguments and positions concerning the stronger presentations of social capital theory, this chapter considers Bourdieu's contribution as the most elucidating and conceptualizing, though Putman and Coleman made substantial contributions. Bourdieu couples environmental considerations with way of life to determine social position. His basic proposition is that social position determines social capital.

This chapter concludes with a short discussion on youth engagement. This segment highlights the distractions and objections youth have when acting indifferent to social causes. The discussion considers the importance of appreciating technology and social media as a tool through which future generations will engage in community thus identifying the utilization of technological resources as social capital. Such a discussion is important in that it describes youth and young adults within a hyper-technical context. It also assesses the probabilities for social engagement paradigms for future generations.

Social Capital

For centuries, organizing was an integral part of revitalization. Garnering social capital for the most part was instrumental in any human endeavor. For example, in the Numbers chapter thirteen reconnaissance project, Moses gathers the leaders of the "houses" of Israel to investigate and report about the condition of Canaan. Although Moses never consults or collaborates with the inhabitants of Canaan and though he fails to recruit women, his effort is nonetheless an attempt to utilize social capital as a tool to accomplish a goal.

Social capital in its most advantageous form is the consideration of all stakeholders within a system. In community, social capital would include groups and individuals across a broad economic, political, religious, age, gender, and cultural spectrum. Also, in action, it would incorporate shared values and cultural norms as opposed to overshadowing inhabitants' cultural practices with the practices of outside agents to empower communities to transcend social oppression and emerge as flourishing and competitive communities. Ideally, social capital's fungibility emphasizes the value of insider and outsider in a mutual aim to create cultural bridges and subsequent benefit to all parties involved. It assumes that all parties not only have a vested interest in community organizing but the wherewithal to substantially contribute toward it.

During the middle of the twentieth century, a doctrinal concept of individualism encumbered the praxis around social capita. Persons moving to the suburbs were removed from the social difficulties of urban life and were lulled into a complacency in which activism and community organizing were not seemingly necessary. In his book, *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Harvard professor Robert Putnam concludes that when it comes to social engagement, there is gross disparity between privileged and marginalized groups. He follows his assessment of the disparity in community engagement in the years of suburban flight with a provocative question. He writes:

The decline that has afflicted such traditional manifestations of civic involvement as membership in voluntary associations, voting, and taking part in electoral politics has been concentrated most heavily among the socially and economically marginalized, not among the more privileged segments of the middle class. These differential rates of decline, together with the fact that nearly all forms of social capital (old and new) remain heavily slanted toward the privileged rather than the marginalized, raise, in my view, an important normative question: Can social

capital in the United States be developed in ways that do a better job of bridging the privileged and the marginalized than appears to be the case at present?³

The answer to such an interrogative proposition is highly dependent on the goal and associated process. In the exercise of realizing a goal of community revitalization, community organizing was accused of taking unfair advantage of marginalized inhabitants of a devalued community. In the eyes of gentrifiers and other community developers, there are communities with potential, but dislocating long-term inhabitants both physically and socially is the cost of manifesting their potential. Restructuring communities by restructuring their cultural interests and attractiveness traumatizes residents whose culture was a long-standing staple, and while sometimes not ideal this drove the socio-economic climate.

Though community organizing through social capital is a noble effort and in recent years enjoyed a renewed and urgent interest, there was a necessary watchful eye placed on its practice to ensure that it fails to morph into a self-serving mockery of its ideological foundation. In a 2009 panel discussion at the Spring Institute for Lived Theology, panelist Susan Glisson contributed a stinging critique of the motivations of the agencies that constitute social capital. Every form of social capital appreciating the work and the people are important. Glisson asserts, that just like people in the 1960's used community organizing to further their own goals for maintaining supremacy, recent community organizers "have contributed to the perception of a professionalized expert-

³ Robert D. Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 60, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3051849>.

client relationship rather than one that seeks to learn from community wisdom.”⁴ Outside organizations purposed to participate in community revitalization kept a distance between themselves and communities they “serve” to preserve their hierarchical position among the “other.”

It is important to note that there has been a decline in organizational membership and civic engagement. In *Bowling alone*, Putnam discusses isolation and individualism as the cause of declining social capital. He compares 1920 upon the ratification of the nineteenth amendment as a time when civic activity spiked, and citizens were increasingly aware of civic obligation. Civic mindedness was crowned by John F. Kennedy’s inaugural plea stressing the importance of civic action. It was a time when civic engagement and specifically social capital benefitted diverse societies.

As an example of how social capital benefits a society, Putman lays out the socio-political condition of Italy during the mid-1970’s under Italy’s government reform. He contrasts the political processes that played a part in the social successes and failures of the North and the South. Putnam associates late twentieth century social success as follows:

[The] regions characterized by civic involvement in the late twentieth century are almost precisely the same regions where cooperatives and cultural associations and mutual aid societies were most abundant in the nineteenth century, and where neighborhood associations and religious confraternities and guilds had contributed to the flourishing communal republics of the twelfth century. And although those civic regions were not especially advanced economically a century ago, they have steadily outpaced the less civic regions both in economic performance and (at least since the advent of regional government) in quality of government.⁵

⁴ The Project on Lived Theology, “Community Organizing as a Spiritual Discipline,” <https://www.livedtheology.org/resources/community-organizing-as-a-spiritual-discipline/>.

⁵ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 162.

Putman credits civic engagement as an element of social advancement that transcends both time and economy. He also names civic engagement as a factor behind economic growth. A postmodern example of the use of social capital in organized community revitalization named Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) infuses support scaffolding into under-functioning and underfunded communities. LISC is an example of a community development organization that serves as partner with other community initiatives to bridge the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged populations for the purpose of transforming communities. According to economist and author Ross Gittel, LISC crosses boundaries of class, race, and ethnicity to establish local community development corporations that link residents with private sector organizations that can serve the needs of their community.⁶ The intent of such affiliations is not for the sole purpose of infusing dollars into the community, but to stimulate community growth and vitality through cultural awareness and understanding created through relationships.

In Pierre Bourdieu's paper, "The Forms of Capital," he explains the monopoly of money and property driven economics as only a fragment of the full scope of social capital. A most appreciated and prized contributor to cooperative efforts to create power, he maintains that the social capital has self-correcting mechanisms to preserve the group dynamic and to assure that its goals are secure. Also, the dynamics of social capital maintain a central voice that speaks for all. The voice is embodied in a signifier, which speaks the will of a whole who are equally as powerful as the one but unable to acquire a voice strong enough to effectively push the agenda of the group. Bourdieu explains:

⁶ Ross Gittel and Avis Videl, "Social Capital and Networks in Community Development: Framing the LISC Demonstration," in *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1998), 15, <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781452220567.n2>.

Everything combines to cause the signifier to take the place of the signified, the spokesmen that of the group he is supposed to express, not least because his distinction, his “outstandingness,” his visibility constitute the essential part, if not the essence, of this power, which, being entirely set within the logic of knowledge and acknowledgment, is fundamentally a symbolic power; but also because the representative, the sign, the emblem, may be, and create, the whole reality of groups which receive effective social existence only in and through representation.⁷

In this sense, an innate form, philosophy, or idea becomes tangible as the sign takes on practical existence. The group constitutes its relative practicality within a greater system. In addition, the group when pushing the limits of its authority becomes naturally reflective and self-examining that no voice would outstep another or violate the cause for which the social capital was garnered.

Stakeholder Relationships

In economically poor communities, the accumulation of varied (especially economic) social capital affords a measure of influence unavailable to its inhabitants. Bourdieu is highly critical of the overemphasis and hyper-appreciation of money as social capital. He advocates that social capital is far more than economics. Bourdieu contends,

It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory. Economic theory has allowed to be foisted upon it a definition of the economy of practices which is the historical invention of capitalism; and by reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit, i.e., (economically) self-interested, it has implicitly defined the other forms of exchange as noneconomic, and therefore disinterested.⁸

⁷ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 24.

⁸ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 15-16.

One must consider how resources and social capital collaborate to create a common representative voice. Equally, it is important to consider the role resources have in aggravating the compromising characteristics of a group. Some bring economic resources that tend to infuse their personal interests into the agenda of the group. Further, it is important to carefully select social capital for a group that may substantially profit the group at any given time. Therefore, there are times within a group's life where one type of capital has more relevance than the others. This is especially true of the talents each member or stakeholder in a grouping of social capital brings to the civic table. Also, it is important that a member's or stakeholder's level of contribution to a concentrated social effort is not overestimated or underestimated through assessments superfluous to their actual ability and likelihood to contribute. Clause Offe and Susanne Fuchs provide a framework for assessing the basic level of the quality of social capital. In their chapter in Putnam's volume, it states:

For the sake of convenience, we subdivide this universe of associative forms into primary, secondary, and tertiary ones, with secondary associative patterns being the only ones serving our purpose. We proceed then by providing reasons as to why the first and the third of these forms or patterns of association are not suitable as indicators (or accumulators) of social capital. The sociological typology of types and patterns of collective action is based upon the combination of two dimensions: Goals can be (relatively) fixed or variable, and membership status can be rigidly fixed or easily acquired and abandoned.⁹

The primary form of social capital includes family or blood such as parents and children. Also, relationships exist that fit this mode that are based on covenant, such as wife and husband (which is a relationship that is presumed to be for life), sororities and fraternities, and orders of Masons. Membership is generally fixed. Next, to be listed between numbers one and three is appropriate for this second form as it has the most

⁹ Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, 192.

mediative format. A synergy exists among the membership to this form that keeps the goals of the group both common and fluid. Associations and civic clubs are examples of this form as they continually evolve to meet the needs of both members and community. The third is formal and oriented toward a goal or purpose. Its membership varies and is generally attractive to affiliates who seek a mutual outcome with the primary emphasis being the goal. An example of this form is a political party. While members are free to exit the relationship, they are not inclined to exit their support of the philosophically based goal that the party represents. Thus, they would maintain a loose relationship based on affinity to a political ideology. These forms are instrumental in understanding social structures as they relate to social capital and its associated value. However, additional considerations exist for conceptualizing the social capital theory.

Relational Correlates in Social Capital

Author Nan Lin presents a three-pronged proposition intrinsic in the framework of social capital theory including social-resources, strength-of-position, and strength-of-ties.¹⁰ First, a social resources position contributes the idea that there is a commonality among all societal entities. They appear both literally as economic resources or social connections or figuratively such as loaded cultural traditions.

Second, the idea that strength-of position proposes is that there is a proximation to access and influence that is hierarchical. Lin argues that “the better the position of origin,

¹⁰ Nan Lin, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 82, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=201839>.

the more likely the actor will access and use better social capital.”¹¹ Seemingly contrived, a position of influence can stem from a person’s natural connection within a social network—even from a familial framework. Some social capital, however, arrives from a less formal confluence of person and mission than is characteristic to nuclear family; it is equally concerned with the furthering a body of work and building relationship. Positions of ego are either ascribed or acquired. Lin describes ascribed positions as those that are natural and those for which people fail to contend. Such positions could derive from family relationships. Lin defines attained position as those that are acquired, thus outside the scope of natural inheritance.

The strength-of-position presupposes the correlation between power and position citing that the higher a person’s position on a hierarchical system, the greater the reach one has. There is an increased propensity of a person functioning in a higher social position to reach beyond primary sources to connections with sources of their primary sources. Lin hypothesizes that higher positioned people tend to build networks of sources far wider than those of lower position.¹² There is an advantage of relationships of trust. The singular eye toward mission, however, is anticlimactic to creating one of the foremost features of collaboration, which is shared understanding and appreciation of the culture of all stakeholders and the things that matter to them. This shared understanding tends to evolve and create bonds between people that extend beyond the common mission.

¹¹ Lin, *Social Capital*, 64.

¹² Lin, *Social Capital*, 66.

Third, the strength-of-ties proposition is the efficacy of relationships both horizontal and subordinate. Those who share in relationship share influence. Further, this proposition employs the homophily principle, which involves synergy between persons or institutions of similar character. The strength-of-ties in building social capital speaks to the degree to which the group is cohesive and stable as well as the ties group members have to powers outside the group that will add power and influence to the group's capital. This relationship requires sensitivity to the mission, trust through transparency, and loyalty to participants and to the mission of the group. There is a mutuality or agreement between entities that ensures that honesty and trust will prevail and transcend any matter. The strength of the relationship between entities—either individual or institutional—constitutes social capital. Sociologist James Coleman posited social capital as a resource or perhaps a consent to utilize the resources of others based on trust. Coleman's narrative illustrates this concept:

Wholesale diamond markets exhibit a property that to an outsider is remarkable. In the process of negotiating a sale, a merchant will hand over to another merchant a bag of stones for the latter to examine in private at his leisure, with no formal insurance that the latter will not substitute one or more inferior stones or a paste replica. The merchandise may be worth thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of dollars. Such free exchange of stones for inspection is important to the functioning of this market. In its absence, the market would operate in a much more cumbersome, much less efficient fashion.¹³

A fundamental feature of the relationship between merchants is that it is without formality or suspicion and operates on an almost perfunctory basis. Trust between the two merchants as routine negotiators exemplifies strength-of-ties. Trust, therefore, acts as social capital necessary to function in their type of market. Also, conceivably social

¹³ James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): S98, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243>.

capital that passes a strength-of-ties test would incorporate guiding principles to prevent the hijacking of its interest by outside sources. Thus, it would be incumbent upon all persons who have strong ties to safeguard all stakeholders from the intrusion on their resources' ideas that may corrupt the purpose of the group. Perhaps often, outside influencers who hold power—particularly economic resources—seek to sway the direction of a group to fit their own agendas. Stakeholders sometimes acquiesce to the holders of economic power or at least seek to negotiate, which can lead to the weakening of the body of social capital, the watering down of the mission, and the unsettling of stakeholders. Subsequently, such disruption may lead to waning of the vigor needed for organizational and missional praxis.

To maintain the strength and vigor of the mission and praxis, the voice of inhabitants of the community in which social capital works is essential to the process of community organizing for the purpose of revitalization. Focusing on the value-based and spiritual core of the community will make it possible to overcome the loosening of external borders and the organizational structure's binding nature.¹⁴ Thus, it is crucial that when employing the three propositions, they are held to the standards of the intent of the mission to which it applies and works in support of the structures and culture inherent to the community.

Social capital responds and evolves out of the common needs of community. Institutions, legislation, and jobs are created to study, correct, or answer these common social needs and deficiencies. Lin states that in its most effective sense, social capital is not only encompassing the norms and traditions of a community or society, but it also

¹⁴ Shay Ben Yosef, "Community Development by the Complexity Theory," 4, <https://shayby.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/community-development-by-the-complexity-theory.pdf>.

expresses the value of its practicality. Therefore, Lin compares, contrasts, and interrelates the two where, “at the empirical and research levels, social resources are used; at the general theoretical level, social capital is employed.”¹⁵ Social capital, therefore, is incorporated to create a bottom line of practical conditions that are active, revolutionary, and revitalizing for the lives of people. This product of social capital or more fittingly what social capital purchases is best created through transactions among insiders and previous outsiders. Such transactions that create social capital are those that contextualize communities from the historical perspective and practices of disenfranchisement, socio-economic deprivation, and their causal relationship with gender, racial, religious, and other forms of bias and bigotry.

The Church and Civic Engagement

The Church universal has an opportunity to bring an element of social capital to the civic table. The Church espouses a platform of justice that derives from doctrinal precepts of faith. It has the spiritual impetus for engaging the world and it comes into the world with social capital unlike any other entity but equally essential. The Church must be an entity of grace in the world and take precautions for becoming an ill-used method for method for only indicating the faults and dysfunction of community but must mobilize community toward the light of Christ through the coop of varied gifts and disciplines. Similarly, it is the charge of the Church to be aware and to consciously turn attention toward the blight and suffering of people as Jeremiah orders the remnant when he writes “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to

¹⁵ Lin, *Social Capital*, 82.

the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7). God expects the faithful to find places in the world to serve God’s purposes. The condition of the city will also be the condition of the faithful. The peace of the city is inextricably tied to the peace of the Israelites in the city. The translation of welfare is the “shalom,” the Hebrew word for “peace.”

In *The Space Between (Cultural Exegesis): A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*, the author discusses “shalom’s” communal implications where “the Hebrew verb for ‘seek’ (dirshu) is a plural command. Individual humans can’t have shalom in the fullest sense of that word; only human communities can... Seeking shalom, then, necessarily means participating in one or more communities.”¹⁶ Thus, Jeremiah’s intent is for Jerusalem to see itself as a community that seeks peace for itself. The author directs attention to the space between the places where people reside and the churches they attend. The space between the two are considered the public square that the church often ignores.

The community around the church is far from the church commuter who enjoys the luxury of riding shuttle busses that bring parishioners from the satellite church parking lot to the front door of the church on Sundays. Their concern is not the same concern as that of the neighborhood. On occasion, the church will serve the community holiday dinners or invite neighborhood residents to church service. Congregations far from embrace the church’s community along the lines of its dysfunctional condition rooted in historically unjust social practices, but often treat the symptoms of a community

¹⁶ Eric O. Jacobsen, *The Space Between (Cultural Exegesis): A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 133, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3117092>.

in which the real estate was devalued. Churches build programs to address surface needs like food and sometimes housing insecurity but hardly build coalitions to address and eliminate causal elements. There is room for churches to express the amelioration of living conditions by raising of social standards and opposition to practices rooted in the bigoted devaluing of the human being.

The gamut of players considered social capital is expansive and diverse. Every field and institution in society is a potential gift and source of social capital. Contemporary forms of social capital include social media and technology. Given the younger generation's disinterest in civic engagement, how can the internet be used to engage youth and young adults in civic engagement? In the article, "'Connecting' and 'Disconnecting' with Civic Life," authors Dhavan V. Shah and R. Lance Holbert further define the interrogative by asking "Under what usage conditions is Internet use related to civic volunteerism, social trust, and life satisfaction?"¹⁷ Though schools and college encourage social engagement and civic responsibility—many times as a requirement of graduation—Generation X and younger persons fail to embrace these concepts. The authors attribute the disinterest and the lack of participation to "aggregate-level media variables (e.g., rising rates of television usage and declines in newspaper readership)."¹⁸ The article seeks to find ways in which young people are intrinsically interested and therefore engaged.

¹⁷ Dhavan V. Shah, Nojin Kwak, and R. Lance Holbert, "'Connecting' and 'Disconnecting' with Civic Life: Patterns of Internet Use and the Production of Social Capital," *Political Communication* 18, no. 2 (April 2001): 142, <https://dshah.journalism.wisc.edu/files/2017/01/PC2001.pdf>.

¹⁸ Shah, Kwak, and Holbert, "'Connecting' and 'Disconnecting' with Civic Life," 143.

Therefore, it is suitable to investigate beyond Western culture to see if youth disengagement is universal. Also, discussion of youth and young adult civic involvement as social capital is by no means discursive but is material to the claim that social capital is generationally relevant. Youth disengagement in the current construct of community organizing may not be counterproductive. Conversely, it may lend to evaluate the measure of reform that would attract the engagement of young people. Therefore, disinterest among youth directly impacts the resource pool of a large part of the population and an integral member of the bank of stakeholders in community revitalization.

Conclusion

In summation, Bourdieu's initiating work is not only instrumental in bringing the term social capital theory to the arena of social resources as well as community organizing and engagement, but it is also responsible for unpacking social capital theory's strategic relevance and practicality. Albeit more contemporary economists and sociologists challenged Bourdieu's work, particularly as it related to social capital being relatively affixed to class, it provided for discussion and contemplation of how important social engagement is to socio-political development. Bourdieu shows discomfort with the idea that economic capital is a looming part of social capital that shapes and influences social development. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that he attempts to bury economic influence under the auspices of social capital and not distinguish it as he has done for cultural capital.

Putman on the other hand embraces social capital theory as the collection and use of resources for the common good. He posits networking as the central concept behind social capital. Putman hinges it on the notion that everybody needs somebody and the adage that it is not what you know but who you know that can lend to one's progress. Networks, in his opinion, are primary to social capital. One of the resources he highlights is trust. For Putman, trust is the central asset that is born out of relationship and drives the market. Trust is both assumed among like populations and reciprocally accumulative in value. In a practical sense, trust is an important asset for community revitalization. Community members must trust each stakeholder and actor's dedication and loyalty to the ideology of community revitalization for the common good. This may be difficult in that stakeholders and actors may not have the same cultural background and understanding that would appreciate the urgent need to revitalize communities without altering or uprooting long-standing cultural affixations and traditions that neither harm nor preclude transformative success.

Another difficulty is where actors are self-indulgent and use social capital for their own self-serving agendas. This type of behavior often surfaces when economic capital is regarded higher than cultural capital. That is, there are conditions where finances needed for community revitalization are exploited and touted over the head of persons who bring the social capital of cultural relevancy to the table. When financial capital or even relationships with strong ties to others who can lend resources walk away from the civic table, would cultural capital be enough to sustain revitalization? On the other hand, if cultural capital walked away, would finance or economic capital be able to revitalize a community for the good of the inhabitants of the community? Certainly,

Putman's concept of trust has merit as there are countless social structures that are built on mutual trust. It may be worth further discussion as to how such trust plays out in Western society where individualism is prevalent.

These are major considerations when addressing the efficacy of including a wide array of social capital at a civic table. None of the types of social capital would be able to act alone for the common good. Therefore, when one type has a superior or driving role in community revitalization, other types may oblige to follow the path or vision of the primary actor. For instance, if money becomes the driving force, culture may have to concede its role in influencing outcomes. As a result, revitalization will most likely not serve those without access to money, the poor, or otherwise disadvantaged but will perhaps open the door to gentrification without regard to the social structure of the inhabitants.

In closing, social capital is the investment individuals and organizations make in the improvement of any social entity. Understanding how it ideally functions and equips actors, stakeholders, and investors with collaborative energy to ensure corporate success and benefit is important. Stakeholders appreciating the value and role of each type of asset and not overvaluing any specific type is essential. Social capital is central to the work of community organizing and is causal in both gaining interest of community inhabitants and external entities. Yet, the capital must be internalized to some extent to serve the inhabitants as opposed to displacing them. Thus, the bottom-line role of social capital is to collaborate to afford justice and equity to communities that were undervalued.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Some might call my context incapable of and disinterested in revitalization. With the spiritually naked eye that could seem plausible. However, the prophetic sense brings to bear witness that, “. . . nothing will be impossible with God” (Lk. 1:37, NRSV). Old Bowie is an unincorporated area in the city of Bowie, Maryland. The church I pastor is located on a slight hill in the center of the mostly residential community. It is an eccentric town and somewhat quirky as the hopes for its resurgence far outweigh the energy and interest of its residents to see the community rise to its one-time prominence as a neighborhood full of thriving antique shops.

When I arrived at Bowie UMC, I saw a valley of dead-like bones. There were people who verbalized that they saw no purpose in or reason for changing or improving anything. They knew things were not going well, the neighborhood, and the community had slumped into disrepair, and the church was in deep financial trouble. They thought it was a matter of fate that could not be altered by any well-wishing, programs, or prophetic action. In effect, they were pronouncing benediction on the life of the church because they held the assumption that when they leave the church, whether walking or being rolled out with flowers, the church would not be able to survive. At that point, they felt that church revitalization was not an option. They had never looked beyond the walls for

help, inspiration, or relationships critical to institutional revitalization. One of the mainstays of my doctoral work concerns, institutional interrelatedness, and responsibility, particularly as they relate to the church in community. Asserting the importance of such a linchpin as interrelatedness of community institutions, including the church, effected not only the area of research but the hypothesis. That is, the formulation of the hypothesis was shaped by discussions and sharing of experiences within the Rooted cohort, influence of Rooted leadership that are institutional leaders and change agents, and the general academic atmosphere at United Theological Seminary. Thus, the project and document did not spring up on its own but is a product of collegial and church community conversations, mentoring, and doctoral research. The autobiographical reflection helped me find my place in this academic work. The biblical chapter pointed me to the foundation of the theory I held about the church and community engagement and even went so far as to allow me to take the risk of alternative reading and interpretation of scripture. Seeing Israel in the desert through a post-colonial lens provided me the courage to counter traditional teaching that has been a large part of my Bible research experience. The historical view of oppressive systems bolstered my awareness that systemic oppression was not new and had existed even through God's chosen nation. In their chosen-ness, they obfuscated the meaning of God's light to the world. They disconnected themselves from humanity in favor of using their relationship with God to be a liberating light for Canaan.

The twenty first century Church is disconnected from their ecclesiastical mission to be the light to all people. The inside of the four walls is a barrier alienating church members from community. Church members felt irrelevant to the broader context and

had no understanding or appreciation for the culture of the community in which they are located. In my early encounter with residents of my new neighborhood, several said they thought the church had been closed for years. The neighborhood seemed relationally fragmented. Though members have blood relatives who may live as close as next door, they had no regular interaction with them and seem to be distant.

Through conversations with church members about the future of the church and engagement possibilities with community, I surmised they were skeptical. It seemed they were merely counting the few little gray heads that gently rose above the backs of the pews and decided that it would be useless to start anything new or do anything different. They were measuring the mounting sand at the bottom of the hourglass of their personal mortality that suggested that there was far too much sand rising in the glass for them to be effective, necessary, or wanted in the revitalization of the church. There was little stamina to support change. As well, they may have looked at me coming through the door and thought that this Black woman could no more lead this traditionally White congregation into a state of revitalization than the dusty box of assorted mugs stacked in a box behind the abandoned choir stand. But in my opinion, they had neglected to factor in the resurrecting and restoring pneuma of God. Thus far, the church has made marginal improvements in moving toward the idea that successful change for the church is feasible and quite possibly in their lifetime. The church felt disconnected from their ecclesiastical mission.

Over the past four years, the hand of God has begun to turn the hearts of the people from barren to expecting. To see the hand of God presently upon what seemed impossible is one of the greatest attestations one can have. In this context, I am both

worker and witness, tenant, and testifier. I have a life resume full of evidence of overcoming. I recognize the fact that my life of overcoming obstacles by the power of God informs my present context, and my obstacle-filled context informs my life.

It is important that the transforming voice of God affect the community and the church and that its greater community accept the charge to mutually inform. For productive change as the personal witness of pastor and people overcoming the world informs our worship and the life of the church, so should it inform and affect the community. The church must embrace the call for revitalization, even if it feels the embers of what used to be a lively church have reduced to ashes. After all, ashes are useful for polishing silver and neutralizing soil and while ashes may represent death and mortality, when used appropriately it supports life and vitality. If we invest the ashes of wisdom, history, and past church culture in the vision for revitalization and the soil from which it grows and develops, it will produce a new crop of persons who hold the history and culture of the old church as wisdom for the local church to come. Thus, it is critical that we do not throw out the old in favor of new. Instead, we must involve the wisdom and commitment of the few that remain – even if they stayed only to turn the lights off and bolt the doors shut. They are committed to the church.

The church must influence the community that its work is crucial to the success of the community although it may not always identically match the community's assumed priorities. Though Jesus had a mission distinguishably different from the world he reached out to the world for partnership and the world was his community. He parabolized his mission to position his divine community within the confines of a secular

understanding. It is the commitment of the church to show the light of God that they and others can eventually see with clarity.

Relevant conditions considered, there are strong indications the Old Bowie community in which the church is located is vulnerably standing at a threshold of renaissance. Bowie UMC has an incredible opportunity to not simply catch the wave but be part of the wave making. The church must fully participate in the community's metamorphosis. It must act in a way benevolent to change without harm to residents of the community. The congregation and I must be spiritually sensitive, resilient, appreciative of diversity, and present at the change table. Teaching and learning can best equip the congregation to find meaning, strategize, be light in shared community, and disciple through community engagement.

The synergy chapter synthesized the spiritual, theoretical, and theological and rested all three on the back of practical ministry. The synergy chapter emphasized the importance of action and practical application to what we know to be right and true, that our spirituality and theology needs energy and advocacy that cannot be contained in church services, Sunday schools, and fellowship dinners in church basements. The damns of religion must burst to allow the voice of God through the Church to be heard everywhere and at every time there is injustice, even in ways inconvenient to politics.

Methodology

Teaching was the principal platform for project implementation. I employed an action research approach to teaching and learning to accommodate any modality shifts or intense reflexivity. The objective of this project was to exact palpable change in and

outside our church. M. Given, editor of *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, defines action research as “a flexible methodology uniquely suited to researching and supporting change.”¹ It was understood that the research process had to be flexible, reflexive, and vulnerable enough to permit adjustments that would yield the most accurate data. Additionally, the project had to accommodate a reflexive approach allowing an opportunity for an assessment of my own biases and preconceived notions that may exist and influence data collection process. It was to the project’s advantage that action-based teaching and learning fits well within context-based research. Further, action research and practical learning are mutually complementary. The reflexivity that action-based teaching platforms offer is an intricate part of the research that promotes transparency and accentuates the idea of researcher-learner. Givens explains, “The goal of being reflexive is to identify any personal beliefs that may have incidentally affected the research.”² Optimally, reflexivity allowed me to create a teacher-student, leader-servant model where the teacher’s learning experience is concomitant to the participants’ experience.

Additionally, action research design created spaces for intermittent adjustments. Action research gave the participants and me an opportunity to extrapolate data intermittently which helped me to make any warranted real-time adjustments. The action research method is a hybrid of reflective and inquiry-based pedagogy allowing a shared opportunity for inquiry and adjustments in curriculum. This learning platform created an environment where curiosity and reflection are key. Thus, as much as the project is

¹ Lisa M. Givens, "Action Research," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 5-7, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n4>.

² Givens, "Action Research," 5-7, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n4>.

designed to produce change in the participants' community engagement practices, the research itself is subject to adjustments that will not necessarily validate the correctness of the hypothesis but would optimize the effectiveness of the participants' experience and secure the outcome's authenticity.

Anonymity is key in helping to produce critical reflection that produces honest and transparent responses. Participants knew that they were expected to write and or reflect as transparently as possible and at the same time keeping their identity discreet. I took great care to communicate to participants that I would be the sole reader of their journals. In "Using Journal Writing to Enhance Reflective Practice," David Boud asserts journal writers may be apprehensive about expressing their authentic experience and associated thoughts for fear that they may be subject to formal assessment or public display."³ He continues, "The more that journal writing moves into the realm of critical reflection, that is, the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions about oneself, one's group, or the conditions in which one operates, the more it is necessary to consider the inhibiting gaze of others."⁴

³ David Boud, "Using Journal Writing to Enhance Reflective Practice," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2001, no. 90 (2001): 9-18.

⁴ Boud, "Using Journal Writing to Enhance Reflective Practice," 9-18.

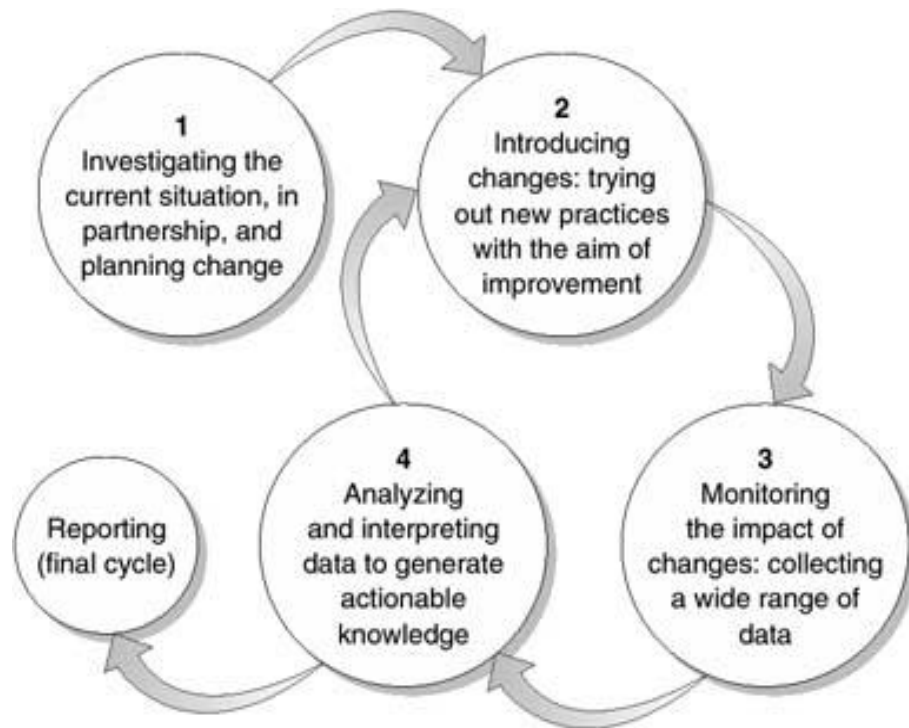


Figure 1. Model of action research

An example of the advantage of teaching for action research can be seen in a project session designed to teach participants the responsibilities of local government and the powers and the authority of local representatives. Participants discovered the range of authority and accountability of local government representatives and the working and power-sharing relationship between elected officials and city of Bowie employees. In the session, four students who had never met their city councilmember nor been to a council meeting, expressed interest in knowing how to frame questions to ask the councilmembers about traffic on a particular street in the neighborhood. The action research method afforded the flexibility to drive the lesson in the direction of the immediate needs of students. This is more than flexible scheduling but reflects the priority of the project to enable participants to meet an experiential or practical goal of engaging civic leaders. Moving a planned activity earlier in the project facilitated the participants' best view of how local officials handle topics like traffic and control, an

important topic around community revitalization and gentrification. The interview of our City Councilmember was moved from a fifth week session to the third session which was the session immediately following the session where the traffic control concern surfaced. Though it had not been planned to take place so soon in the project, it was necessary to address the piqued interest of participants. The councilmember amended his schedule and came to the next session and not only addressed the traffic issue but explained his scope of authority after which participants were given the opportunity to engage the councilmember in discussion about other community matters.

Inquiry-based teaching methods complement action research in that it encourages flexibility that responds to questions and concerns produced by new learning when past knowledge and beliefs are met by new knowledge and understanding. Within the context of this project, new knowledge promoting the church and community engagement is interpolated within traditions perceptions and practices of the church as something to go to instead of something that goes. In each session, the invitation to see the church in community as opposed to the community inside the church building was challenging and even rejected by one of the participants who journaled, “The Church used to be filled up. Then the world started competing with the church and the people followed the world. . . . But when 911 came, people started coming back to church. They know the answer is in the church and not in the world They ran to God.” This journal entry was unsolicited by any planned journal prompt, but it seemed the participant thought it would be important to express their firm opinion on the church’s identity as a building where God lives. From time to time this perception of the church was voiced albeit indirectly. Early in the project it seemed to me that at least two participants were determined that salvation

was housed only in a building. Even more absurd to me was a statement that certain denominations like Seventh day Adventist and Catholicism were at a salvific deficit.

Inquiry-based research challenged me and the participants to view the church differently. Reflexivity, inherent in action research alerted me to the possibility that the project's access to experiential and practical learning opportunities where participants would lend voice to the table would require that I assess the strength of the hypothesis while engaged very early in the project. The hypothetical assumption that teaching participants about systems and structures around political and community engagement would equip them to be politically engaged was met with the need to practice more than what was scheduled in the project. Perhaps instruction should have been strictly action or practice based with sparse moments of lecture and all theory should have been strictly focused on and supportive of practice. Conversely, the project was predominantly lecture based lacking sufficient space for practice. Inquiry based instruction was a saving grace as it allowed students from time to time to self-direct their learning experience. Over time, participants began to take agency of their own practical learning by seeking and gaining membership on community boards and committees. By the end of the project, three participants signed up for community committees and one accepted an invitation (extended by me) to join a community board.

I was subject to the research as teacher-learner continually evaluating my experience, contributions, and effectiveness for achieving the overall goal of motivating church members to be active citizens and community stakeholders. "Reflexivity, where researchers continuously explore their own assumptions and how these shape their research activities, interpretations, and the generation of knowledge, is centrally

important. The self is understood to be a research instrument bringing the researcher's situational understanding, developed through previous action research, to bear on the analysis of social data.”⁵ Accordingly, my role as project designer is not extraneous to the project, subject matter, and outcome.

Videotaping was used to capture movement in the classroom, facial expressions, signs of excitement, fatigue, and inattentiveness (such as using cell phones during introductions, discussions, or lectures). I considered journaling as a means for reflective insight of growth during the span of the instructional process. Journals were typed and saved on color coded thumb drives. This allowed me ease in transferring students journaled information into this document.

Implementation

The purpose of the pre-project analysis was not to examine or critique community development but to analyze church members’ predisposition to engagement in community development against their post-instructional understandings. I developed the curriculum and created intermittent evaluative benchmarks for progress. I also facilitated the classroom teaching, learning platforms, and arranged student engagement in experiential and practical application platforms.

Initially, I proposed that the subject-participants of my project will be the Administrative Council of the context in which I serve as pastor at Bowie United Methodist Church in the Bowie, Maryland. However, after further consideration, I determined it would add more meaning if I opened recruiting to all members of Bowie

⁵ Lisa M. Givens, ed., *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 5-7, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909>.

UMC. I wanted to appeal to those who had never had any community engagement experience and those who may hold office or serve on community related committees and boards. The project flyer had to be designed to prevent any kind of bias toward any types of people, particularly those who are or are not political types.

The participants assumed the role of student. The church is culturally and generationally diverse. Considering how their cultural and generational conceptualizations affect their understanding of justice, community, and civic engagement can provide a more robust assessment of a transformative learning project. While students will enjoy autonomy over their learning experience, I will promote collaboration among students to optimize and broaden their experience.

Basic implementation of the project was three-fold. The initial exercise was information gathering. Participants were given a written abstract of the project and a questionnaire regarding their involvement on civic committees and boards in Bowie. Participants were administered an interest survey to help determine the type of community services that matched their talent and interests. Second, there was a six-week series utilizing a hybrid of inquiry-based and experiential learning pedagogies to teach, inspire, and coach students around community engagement. Third, participants completed a post-project survey indicating gains or losses related to the learning experience. In summation, the project has indicated the effectiveness of training leaders for active participation in community development.

Professional associates played an integral part in this project as I remained accountable to them for keeping objectivity and moving consistently toward the project goal. I sought guidance from them for difficulties and hurdles in both project planning,

implementation, and evaluation. As well, the professional associate offered time to dialog about my newly acquired learning. Context associates participated as guides in planning the project and in assisting me in creating space conducive to advance the project through to the end. Context associates opined about the effectiveness of the project and offered me frequent affirmation and motivation. Also, context associate assisted in obtaining and operating tools, equipment, and materials necessary for the implementation of this project. Finally, the context associate was open and available to dialog about the project.

In the implementation stage, I stated my hypothesis on the recruitment flyer posted in the church bulletin board and on the church website. As well, I sent emails to all members and frequent visitors. The flyer was referred to in Sunday morning announcements for two Sundays. Recruitment was successful even though I yielded to one of my Rooted cohort members to recruit her context participants first. Initially, there were nine persons participating in my project. They were not all Administrative Council members as put forward in my Project Proposal. Many Administrative Council members had committed to work with my cohort member without knowing I would also need participants. I purposely did not advertise my need for participants until my fellow cohort member achieved her recruitment goal. As God's grace would have it, there were certainly enough potential project participants in the church to accommodate both projects and even more who volunteered after we both arrived at our participants limit.

In my participant group, there were eight women and one man. The participants' age range was thirty-four to seventy-four. Four members are retired. One fifty-year-old woman participant cited she did not have the time she thought she would have to commit

and withdrew her offer to participate six days before the project began. All participants identified as African American.

There were six weeks of classes. Each class was held on Thursday evenings from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., June 30 to August 4, 2022, inclusive. Three classes were in-person and three were conducted on the Zoom platform. In-person classes took place in Bowie United Methodist Church's sanctuary. I chose an equal amount of in-person and video conferencing platforms to minimize roadblocks for persons with schedules that may not allow in-person meetings. In-person sessions created the personal interactions that most of the participants over fifty-six vocally favored.

For all the in-person meetings, tables were placed in the altar area of the sanctuary. Chairs were arranged around the table to accommodate student-centered, collaborative leaning. One week prior to the first meeting, participants were given (by email or in hand) a course syllabus which included the project's abstract, meeting times and teaching-learning schedule. Video cameras were positioned to capture my movement around the classroom space and the upper torso of participants to capture facial expression and above the waist hand gestures. I was particularly looking for body expressions and non-verbal communication that indicated participants' type and level of engagement.

Week One: Orientation to Project

The first session opened with devotions and a brief fellowship where participants met and greeted one another. Two students were late while the remainder arrived between fifteen and thirty minutes early. The early arriving participants claimed they wanted to be

early because they did not want to miss anything. This statement indicates to me that at least two participants were excited and serious about the project. I introduced myself and my instructional assistant. The class prayed and sang the hymn, “My Faith Looks Up to Thee.” I welcomed everyone to the project. Each participant took an opportunity to introduce themselves and state an interesting fact about themselves and what they expect to gain from this course. One of the participants stood and prophesied that we would come out of this “seminar” victorious.

I explained the type of information I needed and the advantages of maintaining anonymity in sharing data. I used slides to introduce the course and to describe the methods of information gathering. Next, I left the sanctuary while the professional assistant distributed journals, collected pre-surveys and assigned codes to conceal the specific identification of participants. Participants provided written pre-project written surveys and interviews.

Once the surveys and interviews were collected and the color-coded thumb drives were distributed, corresponding participant names were recorded and secured by the instructional assistant. This part of the first session took approximately twenty minutes. When I returned to the classroom, I explained the journaling process followed by a thirty-minute lesson on seeing scripture through the lens of the oppressed. Using a slide show, I introduced principal concepts of the foundational chapters. We read the project’s foundational scripture, Numbers chapter thirteen, and discussed an alternative reading through a post-colonial lens whose approach to literature includes recognizing alternative voices. I provided a post-colonial interpretation of scripture that addresses social injustice. For our scripture, a post-colonial lens would describe the inhabitants of Canaan

as people oppressed by the Israelite invasion. Students spent the remaining twenty minutes discussing possibility for practical application of lessons learned in the first session.

It seemed on this inaugural class night I would have to protect other students from feeling intimidated by his apparent knowledge of politics and active civic engagement. I explained the term, “stakeholder.” Most, if not all, understood the statement to mean that a stakeholder has a part in something. The conversation around the term was broadened to cover a stakeholder as an entity with a part, sometimes ownership, and with responsibility in community. Students received a journal assignment around the concept of the church as “stakeholder” in the community. The plan to clarify for participants the aim, purpose, foundation, and process of the project seemed successful in the first session. A participant led us in closing prayer, and we were dismissed.

Week Two: Lesson Discovering Concepts of Gentrification

During the second session, I introduced participants to the concept of gentrification as a means for community re-development or revitalization. In three groups of three, students read and responded to the article, “Imagining Whole Cities: The Church's Role in a Gentrifying Neighborhood” by Karen Brau and Bianca Vasquez. Brau and Vasquez present a case study regarding their context, Luther Place Memorial Church, located in the Logan Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C. After an oral reading of the study, I challenged participants to answer a focusing question: “Who benefits?” and “who should benefit?” from gentrification. Most students quickly replied that based on the case study, only the gentry – young, White, financially prosperous people benefit

from the displacement of long-term residents. The follow up question asked what the church's action response should be to unhealthy gentrification and oppressive practices in community revitalization. This question caused some consternation. Members sensed their unawareness of anything the church could do about gentrification. One participant voiced suspicion private conversations were being had among city planners and gentrifiers that the public and especially residents of potentially gentrified communities are not aware of. That participant added, "They make their plans behind the scenes . . . there is no use in doing anything because the decisions about what they are going to do are made when we get to the table." After an intense discussion between those who sought to surrender to inevitability of defeat and optimism for positive change, the session shifted to journaling about the positive and negative constructs of gentrification.

Three participants did not think gentrification was so bad. They offered that gentrification brings businesses like pharmacies, coffee shops, and grocery stores into the neighborhood. They seemed impressed by the glamour of the conversion of quaint homes into shops and tea rooms and open spaces into doggie parks. The final moments of the session were spent with a short slide presentation on community economic development. The class was divided into two groups to complete two discussion prompts related to the slides. The first prompt asked participants to discuss the possible contribution financial institutions can make to community-based development. The second prompt required participants to discuss the difference between large government and grass roots community development organization impact on developing communities. After approximately fifteen minutes, the two groups came together to share principal points from their discussion. The chief difference participants related between federal and

locally driven community development was in the ability to interpret the local community – its people, culture, and resources. The consensus was that even with the help of census data and other demographic information, federal and state governments do not identify with, know, or care about the people in a community – especially minorities. A conversation shifted to the dissolution of minority neighborhoods by state transportation agencies that build highways and rail systems through local communities. This seemed to be a sore spot for participants. The conversation was vibrant. Video captured affirming hand gestures and nods supporting points about aggressive efforts of federal and state governments. Participants remained in the sanctuary for over forty-five minutes after the session as they continued the discussion on how federal and state governments and elected officials care very little about what matters to small minority communities.

Students were encouraged to journal on the personal emotional impact of the session and how the topic of the session made them feel. The purpose of the activity was to draw the participants in to the necessity and effectiveness of their involvement in local community development. I wanted them to sense the necessity and rationalization related to a community's self-determination. A lot of philosophical opinions were born in this session. It was the next session that would marry the theoretical thought to the practical. A participant sprang from her seat and began singing, "Here I am, Lord" and others joined in. Another participant prayed and the session was closed.

Week Three: Students will Discuss Questions Generated by Discoveries from Week Two

It seemed that this was the pivotal session. We began with a fervent prayer for the church in community. We asked God to help us create or participate in justice initiatives for our specific community. Dayton, Ohio community activist, Dr. Mark C. McGuire,

gave a brief lecture on the Christian's obligation to be at the civic table. He pointed out that members of a community have an intensely intimate relationship with their community and must volunteer to be involved in revitalization efforts. Participants became increasingly vocal and raised questions that challenged their own inhibitions about community engagement. The conversation with Dr. McGuire settled into a recognition among participants that they had not been involved in community planning because they thought it was not their responsibility. They acknowledged that when it comes to planning for the community, there is a high degree of bystander apathy among the members of the church. However, by the end of the session some participants asked the question I strongly desired to hear but was expecting after session five or six: "How do I get started?"

During the third session, we examined the practicality of our newborn group theory that a community is best served when locals govern in the process of development. That idea seemed to be developed well with the discussion related to Dr. McGuire's lecture.

Participants seemed to develop new ideas of self-determination. In this session, we were about to recognize that community self-direction and ordering has not been successful without resources. We also discovered the historical and present difficulties in securing resources for the Huntington District, who holds the economic power for our community, and how such power is negotiated, especially among people external to the community.

I reviewed session two and began a discussion on communicating and engaging with resourceful institutions in the community such as banks, community development

corporations, civic clubs, city councilmembers, churches, and educational institutions. I provided a list of resources including names, phone numbers, and responsibility of various community entities. Only one participant said he was accustomed to engaging in one-on-one conversations with city council members and other local officials. I spent a few minutes assuring others that this is a new day for them, and they are being equipped through this project to engage and even negotiate with local officials. I stressed that the spirit in which we engage must be from God. Our job is to be God's representative in the engagement. Thus, participants were urged to engage with prayer and for the power of God to be their mantle that advocated for the justice of God to be the outcome.

The initial plan for this session was to take participants on a field trip to the City Council meeting where one or two could ask questions of the council about the economic plans and future of the Huntington section of Bowie. The council was not in session on the planned date, and it would have taken us outside the planned class schedule to go any other time. As a profitable alternative, our City Councilmember, Michael Esteve met us on Zoom for a powerful conversation that seemed to ease apprehensions among some of the participants about having conversations with elected officials. I think for the most part, some realized that elected officials can be accessible and approachable, and some have a ready ear for the sentiments of the community they represent. Councilmember Esteve received a myriad of questions (and some complaints) about community walkability, a local park that has been abandoned, parking on narrow streets, Old Bowie's identity as a food desert, and the deteriorated buildings in Huntington's small business district. Mr. Esteve answered most questions succinctly while others he vowed to get answers for. He gave all participants his contact information and invited them to stay in

touch with him and keep him abreast of both good and bad things they know of in the community. He also encouraged them to participate on city boards and committees that match their talent or interests.

Participants surveyed sixteen city committees and two neighborhood development committees that are not published anywhere that persons interested in community involvement could join. One of those committees is the Old Bowie Arts and Entertainment Festival Committee of which I am a member. The committee, founded in 2019 by “Jenay,” an African American jazz enthusiast and “Joseph,” a young White politician, is comprised of eleven members. I was recruited to serve on that committee by a City Councilmember and Joseph. There had been some concern that perhaps these two founders would not have the reach, expertise, or scope to make the vision of arts and entertainment district a reality. The city desired more than a one-time summer activity. They wanted to convert the small deteriorating business section of Huntington to an arts and entertainment district. This committee revived the community without the members of the community. There were no long-term members of the community offered a seat at the committee table that would later be authorized to use city funds, close streets, drive a cultural agenda, and make decisions affecting neighborhood walkability and resources.

Approximately one year after founding, new faces joined the committee. One new committee member was a woman highly experienced in project development. She recruited four members and invited them to the committee and the small committee of founders and workers expanded to a group of persons who did not live in the neighborhood but were about to direct its economic development. The leader of the new committee went to a City Council meeting and petitioned the city for \$30,000 to finance

the first Old Bowie festival that had not been held in over eleven years. The city granted the funds to her effort along with commitment to come alongside the Festival Committee with a variety of other financial and strategic support. After this brief narrative of the genesis of the Old Bowie Festival as a revitalization effort through arts and entertainment, I provided a discussion prompt: What did the new leader do to be successful that the founding leaders did not do?

Four participants expressed their frustration that the founders (one being Black) seemed to be the subject of racial discrimination. Others said the Black woman would not have been able to get the money because she is Black. One participant remarked, “Because she was black, they didn’t trust her. That is how they see us. The city probably did not trust her with the money.”

I then introduced the city’s process for requesting funding for public projects. I asked participants if they had a project, they thought they could get funded now that they know the process. All but one seemed to be suspicious of the process and its so-called public-access transparency.

The at-home journaling assignment was to list an area or a project in Huntington that needs development or revitalization funding. Explain the need, identify the beneficiaries, and predict how it will benefit the Huntington section. I also asked them to estimate the cost of the project, if possible. The class concluded with prayer for strength to replace fear with knowledge and to be determined to wrestle against unjust practices of government funding.

Week Four: Gentrification Data Sets

Instead of participating in a live community planning and development session, participants watched a recording of a 2020 meeting around funding the Old Bowie Festival. Inserted in the recording was the City Council session where the Old Bowie Festival leader petitioned the Council for funding. Participants were alert and seemed interested in the vocabulary the council used. I introduced a collection of terms that would be helpful in their understanding of civic engagement: demographics, advocacy, social capital, stakeholder, appropriation, agenda, public comment, public session, ordinances and resolutions, constituent, sub-committees. Though most are already aware of their generic meaning, it was important that they could now relate to city government terms. I introduced participants to The National League of Cities website for their perusal. There were several descriptions of the function of city councils that participants were not aware of. Lastly, I provided participants with gentrification data sets on which participants could base a hypothesis. Throughout the session, there remained a high level of excitement and commitment for establishing and building new and more purposeful relationship with the community. Participants expressed they were making phone calls and getting information from the Internet about how to function on civic boards and committees.

Week Five: Experiential Learning Activity

During this in-person session, students had many more questions. Their degree of inquiry grew to the point that they wanted to ask questions of other city officials. I felt like my work with them went lacking because of the inability to take them on a field trip

to a City Council meeting. Some wanted to go to Annapolis to meet with our state senator, Dr. Ron Watson. I had to explain to them that though I am working with Dr. Watson on a local project, his focus is often different from the focus of local government. I appreciated their desire to expand their understanding of and interaction with government to include the state level. However, I urged them to be locally involved that when going to the state level, they can go equipped with a grass roots understanding.

Week Six: Conclusion and Collection of Materials

I stepped out the sanctuary. My assistant collected the journals and administered a post-project survey. The benediction for this closing session included a plea to God to help us develop a voice for the oppressed. We sang the hymn, “Here I Am” accompanied by our church keyboardist who transposed the song to reflect an African American flair. We then invited the prophet to prophesy. He conveyed the message that our church would be light in our community, transforming, revitalizing, and supporting the people inside and without the four walls. She said the work is not over, but just beginning. “We are gonna defend the ones who cannot defend themselves.” She added, “We are going to prophesy . . . stand up for justice, and know God is helping us.” After the prophecy, we dismissed in silence, with some participants in tears.

The first session’s video recording captures the sense that after the first session persons were unsure of their ability to fulfill the requirements of the workshops. One participant expressed that she did not feel she had what it takes to contribute anything to a “table” where people are making decisions about what is going to happen in the community. Her understanding was that the people at the table were politicians and she

said she hates politics. Furthermore, she was cynical about the relationship between community board members and politicians. She insisted that board members were political pawns who from a grassroots position assist politicians in advancing “racist, capitalistic agendas.” The video shows two others shaking their heads in affirmation. At that moment, I realized that while her comment may have at first seemed antagonistic to my thesis, it actually paralleled it. Of course, there are incompetent and malicious people on boards, but that is precisely the impetus for the Church to be seated – that the competent voice of Jesus would penetrate the ignorance and change the agenda to one which advocates and fulfills the will of God for justice for all people.

Therefore, the notion that boards could be filled with persons not authentically interested in the welfare of the people in the community became a subtheme and rationale for the presence of the church at the civic table. I informed participants that community boards do not make laws or policy as politicians do, but ideally, they represent communities as politicians should. Community boards and civic organizations are the voice of the people to local government agencies.

Summary of Learning

The project provided insight into the evolution of thought and action because of exposure to new ideas even when they counter long-term traditional codes and ideas. Journaling yielded the most affirming accounts of change effectuated through this project. Week after week, participants were increasingly responsive to new ideas, even those that were challenging to ingrained beliefs. Evidence of evolution of thought and opinion was most pronounced in the journal responses after the third session. Their level

of comfortability in writing about community engagement seemed to rise after the encounter with the City Councilmember. This is why I think a more practical or hands-on approach would have been more suitable for this project.

A representative example of this evolution of thought is in the journal of Participant Green. The first session journal prompt asked, “What is the Christian’s call and responsibility for community engagement? How do you fit in?” Participant Green responded,

I’m still waiting for God’s direction to be present [about] being on the table with other participants. I have been helping out with prayers for the crime rate in different communities, I help with donations sometimes and I also help feed the “Great Hope Ministry Orphanage” in Africa etc. . . . I don’t fit in community work. It is not for me. The church cannot help what the crime in the community does for the neighborhood. So as for me, I will keep on doing what I am doing now until I hear a change from God.”

The journal prompt after the third session was, “Rev. Dr. McGuire, a convicted felon, has become a beacon of God’s light and a conduit for the voice of justice as he works with the governor and sits on community boards next to the judge that sentenced him to six years in prison. Has his testimony challenged your understanding of the public servant and public service? If yes, explain. If no, explain.”

Participant Green explained:

Rev. McGuire said a lot. I do not know if I would have liked the judge that sent me to jail but that speaks high about his character. He inspired me to get out there and give what I have. I had a son [who] was murdered in the streets. I felt like there was not anything I could do about it at that time. Looking back, I could have done something. I look back at be powerless to stop thing in my neighborhood. I might not be a streetfighter, but I think I can fight if I am what Rev. McGuire said is [an] activist. . . . There is more ways to skin a cat.

Together, participants and I learned about the value citizens see in being involved and able to order the direction and destiny of their community. I learned that there are shared and guarded values in communities among those who were raised and developed there.

Also, evident is a clear delineation among “born heres” and “come heres.” The guarding of the culture and associated values seemed much more robust in discussions led by people born in this community than those who moved there. Also, in the sessions participants who were born in Old Bowie tended to describe their community in the 1960s as a place where everybody got along and respected one another though Blacks could not enter certain business establishments. The pushback on that restriction was that Blacks did not have any interest in going to those places so prohibition against entering them was of no consequence to Black people. In believe that a passive memory and treatment has found its way to the church.

Next, participants and I discovered just how much action is imperative of social justice. Without action and activism that produces manifestation, justice becomes confabulation and banter leading to nowhere. The most striking thing I learned is at the center of moral progress – if one knows better, one will do better. The project revealed the efficacy of the interrelatedness of knowledge and action. Going into the six-week session, I could only imagine (hence, hypothesis) participants in such a short span of time could grow to the point where they would be ready to engage at civic tables.

To a degree, the disadvantage of these sessions is they did not immerse participants in the real-life environment of an economic development or city council meeting. The project did not teach participants how to balance life to accommodate community engagement. Thus, the difficulty participants may encounter will be tension between knowledge acquisition and application. Also, I learned, that some will celebrate and appreciate learning about justice but not be willing to change their lives to fight for it. Participant Orange claims:

It is so hard to balance everything in my life. I know being active [in] community is a good thing and we should but I am only one person. I cannot change the world. I can only change my own world and I do that by working hard. So I cannot be at meetings. I have to be at work. Then I have to take care of 2 other people. Not just myself. So I'm all for justice but I cannot find the time. And relaxing sometimes -- I have to have some time for me.

The drawback to the session is that it may have been more filled with an abundance of theory and insufficiently practical and hands on. Considering the expected outcome of the session is to create socially engaged practitioners, the amount of theory may have been antithetical to the project's mission. While participants were exposed to conversations with the area councilmember, there was deficiency in terms of participation in on-site and authentic meetings and work which would have exposed them not only to the officials but to the sometimes tense and arduous atmosphere of exchange at civic tables and meetings. I am afraid that many of the meetings I have had at civic tables might indeed scare some of them if they are not eased into them. There is a clear difference between intense conversations at work or with family and those in community volunteerism and social action. Participants are bonded with family and loyal to the producer of their paychecks. Conversely, they may not be accustomed to the heavy lifting of advocating for justice through volunteering at civic tables. Many participants voiced concern for the commitment of time. I think they find community action is a worthy cause. Yet, it is a competitor for time which is at a premium.

Another drawback is an extension of my earlier comment. Action requires a long period of orientation. Also, action requires coaching. It is difficult to radically immerse oneself into community organizing. Often, connecting with community requires connections. While community organizations regularly search for recruits, they seem to favor community board members that can represent groups of community members to

assure that they have a sense of what groups of people want and need in community.

Participants would not fully appreciate experientially learning if the topic would not have been presented for its back story or theological themes and reasoning.

The first journal entries revealed that participants learned some things about themselves. Chiefly, they learned they had the capacity to contribute to community revitalization. They were beginning to find a voice. Participant Orange wrote, “At first, I am new to the community. However, I am not new to church and want to join this group because I have something to say. I am a disciple of Christ. Christ will give me what to say and do to make a difference in my community. Participant purple was a bit more reserved but agreed to try to fit in. The participant wrote, “My culture – I do not know if people want to mingle with me or not. I want to know how to be listened to . . . I bring some ideas.”

Participant Green was vacillating between doubtful and hopeful, writing, “I might be able to contribute something to a board of city committee. I do not have any experience. I never been at the table. I am not sure if I know the right things to say. I did not know I could do this. This is something I never experienced but now I want to be at the table one day.”

Participant Blue seemed intrigued with how journaling would help with self-reflection and development. The participant wrote, “I like this journaling. Reminded me of some things. Stirred up some things in me. I want to do it, and I am so inspired by God’s word about responsibility. I think I have procrastinated too long. I have a lot to offer, but I never think of giving my best efforts to my community. I always felt we elect

people to think about and do things we really can do. Even with my demanding profession I need to make myself available.”

Participant Grey wrote the only comments that indicated that Whites had moved into the neighborhood in D.C. and the participant did not want to see that happen in Bowie. Grey was careful to make it clear that the comment was not fueled by racism but by personal experience as a resident in a gentrified Northwest D.C. neighborhood. In the 1970s, the neighborhood was majority Black. It suffered population decline while succumbing to demolition of public housing, street widening, and freeway intrusion at the hands of zealous gentrifiers. Under the guise of community revitalizers, these zealous gentrifiers repurposed culturally iconic structures and closed much needed grocery stores and pharmacies. These changes were at the hands of gentrifiers, usually using public dollars for the purpose of creating safe neighborhoods that catered to the housing needs of White middle class. Toward the end of infrastructure improvements, Whites began to renovate neighborhood properties they had previously purchased at a cheap price. Once infrastructure projects were completed, housing prices were drastically increased. What had once been townhouses occupied by a single family was divided into several condominiums that are usually attractive to adults without children. As childless singles moved in, there was a decrease in public school enrollment. School buildings were either repurposed or demolished and replaced by offices, entertainment venues, or condominiums that catered to White middle-class.

This first meeting was much less conversational than the sessions that followed. There was some pushback on the alternative reading of Numbers chapter thirteen. Participant Yellow commented that Israel is God’s people that He used to shine light in

the world. Three students seemed reserved and made no contribution to the conversation. One student, a director of a large initiative at the White House, has been a state representative, and was a county NAACP Chairman in Michigan countered the participant's comment. Yet, he also voiced slight disagreement with my claim that Israel's interpretation and treatment of the promise was conquering to oppress. However, oppression is not God's salvific and liberating nature and was not God's plan for Israel in the Promised Land. The counter-commentor conceded that Israel failed miserably in being the light. He then voiced a poignant comparison between Israel's failure and the failure of the Church to be the light. His comparison was useful in opening future conversations about the opportunities for the Church to be the light and the Church's responsibility to speak up for the oppressed. Moreover, the claim and counterclaim about Numbers chapter thirteen set us up to discuss the ambiguity the Church has about oppressive world systems and the church's responsibility to people and spaces outside the four walls.

Conclusion

Ideally, finding the mission of the Church should be synchronous with finding the light of God in every imaginable place. Because the earth and its contents both animate and inanimate were created by and belong to God. God's spirit and light has the right to enter any dimension. The Church as a torch bearing agent of God has the call and responsibility to engage for God as ambassador of justice in all places and time. To alienate from that call is to alienate from God. It is to say that God's authority is limited, fragmented, and biased toward the church. Religious thought has produced oppressive

behaviors and biases absent of the salvific grace that God has toward God's creation. Far too long have Christians had an us and them view of Church and world. While the Church is in the world and not of the world, it still has a missionary responsibility to the God for the world. The mission of Methodism echoed from Matthew chapter twenty-eight is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The imperative's assumptive subject is you and the predicate is go!

This project has not taken on the responsibility of dismantling the infidelity between the Church and its duty to engage in justice for gentrified communities or oppressive institutional practices. Instead, it offers an alternative to the separation of theology and public practice.

APPENDIX A

QUESTION: DESCRIBE THE CHRISTIAN'S CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Question: Describe the Christian's civic responsibility.

Participant	Pre-project Response	Post-project Response
Green	Christian civic responsibility is letting our vote reflect our faith	I believe as a Christian if I am not part of the solution, I am part of the problem. There is no area that Christians should not be present in to make our community better.
Orange	Our command from Jesus is to go and teach. I think Christians should be careful about how they are involved in government.	Some Christians can be involved in community work, but it is not cut out for all Christians. Some Christians like me can help out but not give directions. God is calling us to do what we are able to do.
Blue	Believers should be engaged in civic duty via local, state, and federal elections.	Being on the front lines for a righteous and just civil society brings peace to a people.
Yellow	Praying for people, coming to church, participating in church, cleaning the church, paying your tithes and offerings. Always being present.	To pray and to always be present when and where needed.
Red	The church is responsible for preaching the message about the Good News to people who are not Christians. We are called to spread the message to all.	When we vote for candidates, we have to help them fulfill their duties. So as Pastor Kittrell says we have to join community committees to be sure politicians are living up to their promises.
Purple	Christians should serve God and the people.	The church has to do more than pray and give out food. We have to be present in places where decisions are made for us and we have to be the decision makers for our own community.
Black	I do not know fully, but I suspect it partially means Christians must vote and know the candidates and what they represent.	The Christian's responsibility is to become knowledgeable of who we are serving. To know all functions as it relates to mountains of education, government, religion, etc. and most of all how to be involved and present.

U.S. ADULTS ON LOCAL PASTORS' KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNITY NEEDS

Barna

Christian pastors are out of touch with the needs of my community.

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly

All U.S. adults



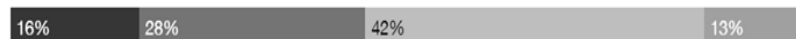
Practicing Christians



Non-practicing Christians



Other faith



No faith



n=2,007 U.S. adults; April 23 – May 5, 2021. | Source: Barna Group | Download image

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1

Exit Question

Discuss how you will use what you have learned in the project to engage in civic activity.

Green	I will make myself more available because this is important. I need to be working at the table in my neighborhood. So, I am pledging to be there. I need to know how my gifts can meet the needs.
Orange	I will engage, be a voice of authority and be loud. God says to be an ambassador for him. That means be like him with influence and love that makes changes wherever I am at the table.
Blue	I am getting involved in community planning. I am also ready to get involved in decision-making process. I have a lot of ideas and a lot to learn.
Yellow	I will be more intentional to build meaningful relationships to share my voice at the table.
Red	I will stop worrying about my accent and if people understand me. I will have Jesus' voice that can speak over my accent. I have filled out an application to be on a committee in Bowie.
Purple	I will look for opportunities to become a greater voice for the greater good. I am not going to just be a Christian inside 4 walls.
Black	I have already started watching what is happening at town hall meetings and see how I can be used.

¹ Barna.com, "Are Local Pastors in Touch with Their Community's Needs? Americans Weigh In," Leaders and Pastors, <https://www.barna.com/research/local-pastors-community-needs/>.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey Questions	Pre Project Affirmative Responses	Post Project Affirmative Responses
1. The church cannot participate in any government matter except those that directly impact the church.	6	1
2. The government cannot provide the church with public funding for church projects.	4	0
3. The church and government cannot work together on community projects.	6	0
4. Christians are advised not to attend government meetings.	3	0
5. Pastors/preachers are barred from participating in political campaigns.	5	0
6. The church cannot ever involve itself in government-sponsored events.	7	1
7. Persons must not mention their religious values when serving in public office.	4	0
8. The government and other civic meetings cannot be held in church buildings without special permission of the city council.	0	0
9. The separation of church and state.	6	1
	42	3

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